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POST-PUNK & SKA

Plus...
1979
YEAR ZERO
+ GARY NUMAN, WIRE, JOY DIVISION'S UNKNOWN PLEASURES AND MUCH MORE

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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS + SKA COLLECTOR'S GUIDE

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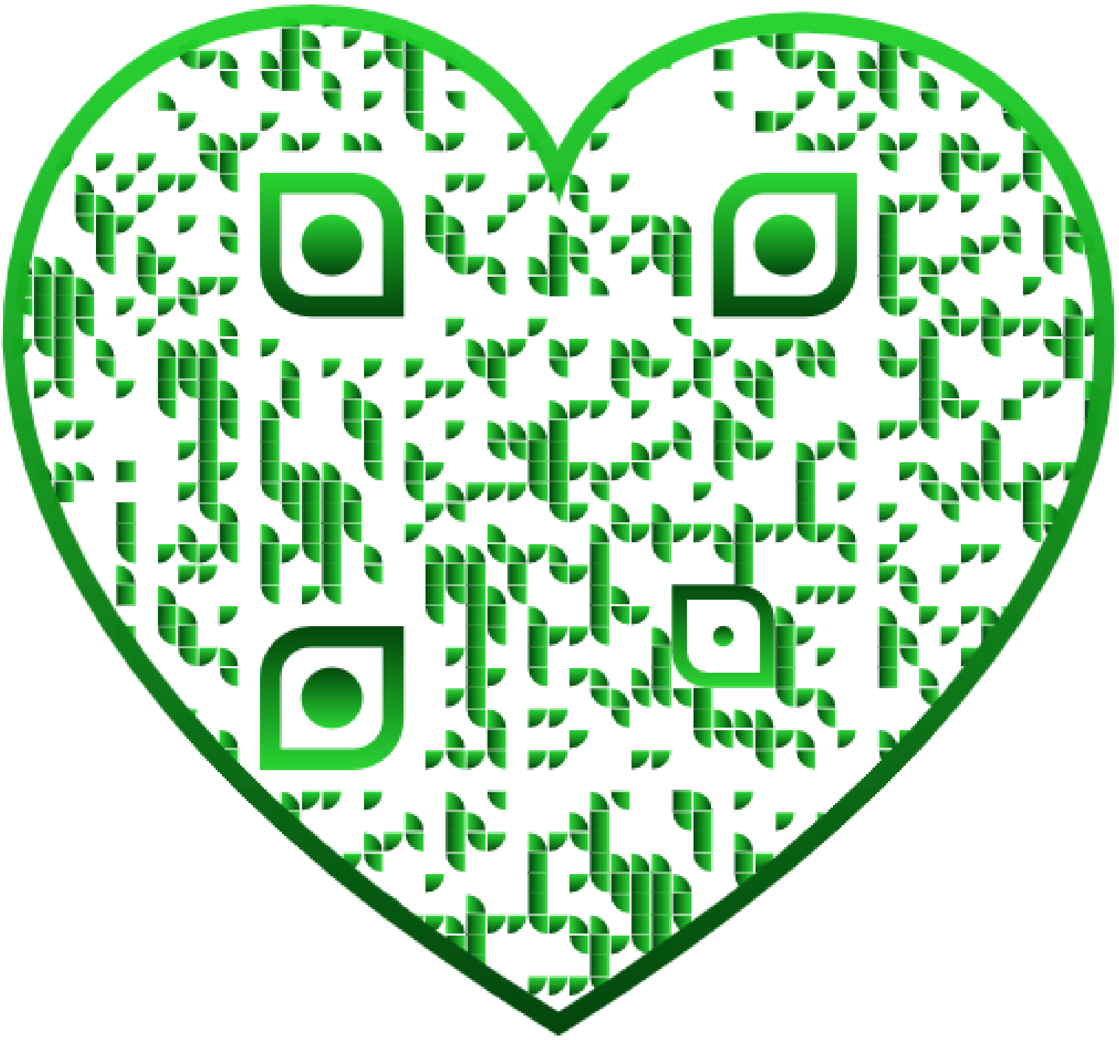

ANTHEM PUBLISHING
PICCADILLY HOUSE,
LONDON ROAD, BATH BA1 6PL
TEL +44 (0) 1225 489 984

Editor Steve Harnell
steve.harnell@anthem.co.uk

Art Editor Alex Duce
alex.duce@anthem.co.uk

Design Andy Cottle and Andy McGregor

Production & Editorial
Gary Walker, Gary Tipp and Steve O'Brien

Contributors
Huw Baines, Dan Biggane, John Earls, Daniel Dylan Wray and Jonathan Wright

Advertising Chris Cope
chris.cope@anthem.co.uk

ANTHEM PUBLISHING

Managing Director Simon Lewis
simon.lewis@anthem.co.uk

CEO Jon Bickley
jon.bickley@anthem.co.uk

Creative Director Jenny Cook
jenny.cook@anthem.co.uk

Head Of Marketing & Production
Verity Travers
verity.travers@anthem.co.uk

Licensing Regina Erak
regina.erak@globalworks.co.uk

PRINT & PRODUCTION

Print William Gibbons & Sons Ltd
Tel +44 (0) 1902 730011

Distributed by Marketforce (UK) Ltd. 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London E14 5HU.
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Welcome...

For some bands, "three chords and the truth" just wasn't enough. Punk may have rescued the live music scene from the excesses of prog, but its limited creative vocabulary was rather suffocating for more imaginative artists.

Instead, the likes of Wire, Joy Division, Magazine, Talking Heads, Gary Numan and The Fall were among those took the visceral spirit of punk and added electronic, dub and skewed funk textures to the mix. Elsewhere, the end of the 70s also saw the emergence of the UK ska scene with bands including The Specials, The Selecter and The Beat.

You'll find the finest exponents of both post-punk and ska in this bite-sized overview of those genres. Read on for an insight into how they created a brave new world...

Steve Harnell, Editor
Follow me on Twitter: @steve_harnell

FEATURES

YEAR ZERO 4
Inside the birth of the post-punk era

GARY NUMAN 10
The synth-pop pioneer discusses his extraordinary career

ODES TO JOY 18
Celebrating Joy Division's *Unknown Pleasures*

WIRE 24
Huw Baines meets the icons behind *Pink Flag*

SPECIAL FORCES 28
How 2 Tone changed the musical landscape

SKA 45s 38
Our pick of the best ska 7" cuts

POLITICS & DANCING 44
The Specials on their comeback album, *Encore*

YEAR ZE

As another decade draws to a close, **Daniel Dylan Wray** speaks to some of the key players from the final year of the 70s, a year that saw the passing of the baton from punk's visceral charge to a whole wave of sonic innovators who would redraw the musical map

IF a single musical year from the 1970s is picked out for special mention it's usually 1977. A landmark often deemed as year zero; the year that punk broke and cracked open a new era that changed music and the ethos behind it forever. The Buzzcocks' *Spiral Scratch* EP kicked off the year and influenced a thousand young bands, Television's *Marquee Moon* became a blueprint for art rock, Iggy Pop released his two best solo albums (*The Idiot* and *Lust For Life*) within months of one another and everyone from David Bowie to Wire released epoch-defining music. But it was also a transitional year, a period when mainstream 1970s rock, from Steely Dan to Pink Floyd to Fleetwood Mac, was still holding far more sway and attention. Arguably, the full reverberations of this landmark year could be felt more comprehensively and eclectically a couple of years down the line.

1979 is as crucial a year in British music as any in history. The potential that punk offered two years prior had now been fully realised by many, as a group of more experimentally leaning artists found themselves hurtling forward at breakneck speed into new sounds and territories. "The transition from 1975 to 1979 felt like 100 years," says Mark Stewart of The Pop Group, a band whose debut album *Y* that year fused the worlds of dub with discordant noise and agitated rhythms. "It was like an industrial revolution had taken place. 1979 was a time of real change – it was like we'd gone from medieval people to highly evolved spacemen. It was crazy, it was like where did all these people come from?"

RO

1979 exists as such a pivotal year because of the multifaceted ecosystem that alternative music made up that year. Seminal post-punk records were released by the likes of Joy Division, The Cure, Gang Of Four, The Slits, The Raincoats, This Heat, Wire, The Fall and so on. But alongside this there was the reawakening of ska and the release of The Specials' debut album; electronic music began to pulse more prominently as the likes of Gary Numan and The Human League reared their heads and Throbbing Gristle released the genre-busting *20 Jazz Funk Greats*. Not to mention that the very same month that Throbbing Gristle sent listeners spinning into the future, punk's last swansong *London Calling* was released.

As 1979 wrapped up, it marked something of a closure period for punk. The groundwork it laid had been picked up on and ran with into sprawling new directions. Countless independent record labels now existed, the guitar-bass-drums-vocals set-up had been twisted, expanded and toyed with, electronics began to come in, industrial sounds started to throb and clatter, and as the beginning of 1980 dawned and Sid Vicious died it felt as though a truly new decade and sound was on the horizon with another one firmly in the past.

The momentum that had been garnered throughout that year felt palpable says Gang Of Four's Andy Gill. "I rather pompously explained to people in the band that what was being made here was of great cultural significance and would resonate down through the years," he recalls. "They thought I was a complete fool and they ridiculed me." Yet 40 years on, the spiky, restless and groove-riddled essence of *Entertainment*! still resonates today, a sound that has been endlessly emulated but rarely bettered. The key to that period being such an exciting and an important one was its diverse nature, Gill suggests.

"All those records from that period are so different. The things that The Raincoats were doing were so different from what we were doing, for example. What was great about that little period was that there was no house style. There were things bands had in common in the way it was formulated, but what came out was very different. The way I wanted the music was to be very rigid and structured, but also exciting. With Gang Of Four, there's like a great big metronome going all the time and you better be locked into it." Ana Da Silva of The Raincoats echoes this. "It was a very exciting time because all the doors were open and anything could happen. There was a feeling that something was happening. It felt very definite to me and very present. It was very different from anything that had come before."

LIFE'S RICH TAPESTRY

Even someone like Steve Diggle of the Buzzcocks, whose band had laid down the foundations of an independently released punk record, saw that things had really come to fruition by the end of 1979. "There was a hell of a lot of mixture and a lot of changes going on, it was a real rich tapestry of music." The band released their third album, *A Different Kind Of Tension,* in September and it captured some of

"1979 WAS A TIME OF REAL CHANGE. IT WAS LIKE WE'D GONE FROM MEDIEVAL PEOPLE TO HIGHLY EVOLVED SPACEMEN"

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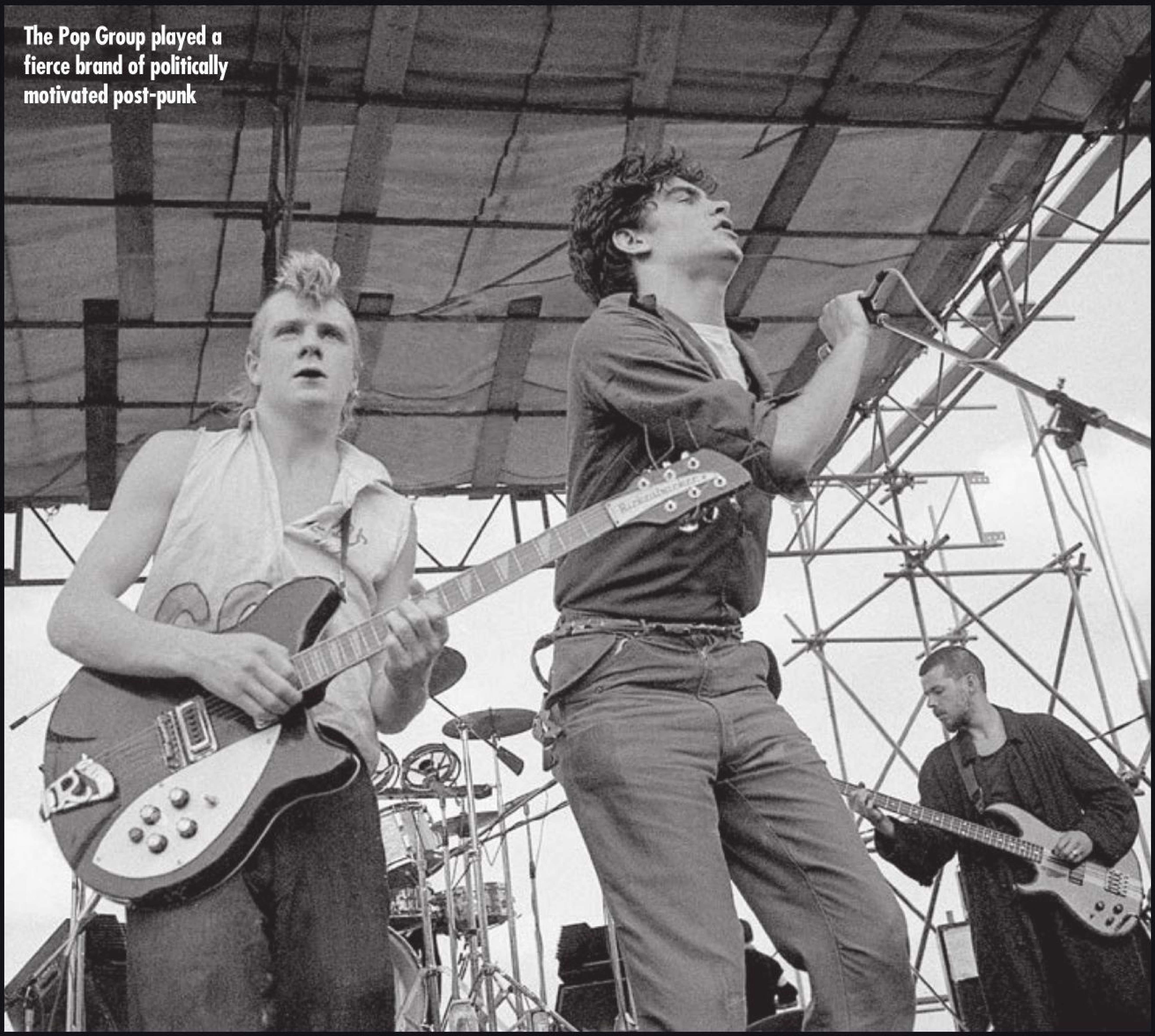
The Pop Group played a fierce brand of politically motivated post-punk

the most experimental explorations that the band had ever undertaken. "When *Tension* came out, things got a bit more complicated, musically. We'd been down a lot of avenues by then and were more interested in expanding on the straight down the line punk stuff. There was a feeling of seeing how far we could take stuff – how far we could go. There was always an experimental edge with Buzzcocks, so it was about asking what do we do next? It wasn't so much that punk had moved on, but people had become more aware of its possibilities."

This time also marked a transitional period in music, when artists were less reliant on obvious influences. "I wanted to make something that was like a new language," says Gill. "Something that didn't rely on off-the-shelf drum beats. It never occurred to me to say, 'oh I like this song, let's copy it." This ethos, in which the rock behemoths of even a few years ago played no pivotal role in shaping the output of these groups, combined with technological advances, marked the beginning of a period in which a pure sonic identity was commonplace. "I felt that everyone was quite different and used different instrumentation," says Da Silva. "They found different ways of expressing themselves. There was such a varied group of people and everybody was looking for their own path. That was really important, to go and do your own thing in your own way."

For Stewart, this led to a healthy paradoxical state: a community of bands the length and breadth of the country, all sounding distinctly unique and idiosyncratic yet deeply connected at the core. "There was a camaraderie amongst outsiders during that time," he says.

"I remember playing a show one time and this kid coming up to me and saying, 'listening to your music makes me feel like I'm not the only weirdo in the village'. Throbbing Gristle were crucial for this. Going to their concerts and suddenly seeing all these other weirdos, you'd be open to all these different kinds of people. It was like stepping into a world that you'd read about in Andy Warhol's *Interview* magazine when you were a kid. That gives you a feeling of strength that you're not a freak."

As the year wound to a close and more electronic sounds began to appear, for Diggle it felt like a new horizon was coming into focus. "When we were doing *A Different Kind Of*

"WHAT WAS REALLY GREAT ABOUT THAT LITTLE PERIOD WAS THAT THERE WAS NO HOUSE STYLE"

1979 ON VINYL

THROBBING GRISTLE
20 JAZZ FUNK GREATS
An album that harnessed the harsh industrial experimentation of their earlier work into a more refined, complete encapsulation of the band that became a defining record of the decade. DISCOGS £45

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METAL BOX
An album that advanced so far on from the band's 1978 debut it's almost like they time travelled. A riotous and innovative blend of dub, post-punk and experimental rock that still sounds untouched today. DISCOGS £90

THE RAINCOATS
THE RAINCOATS
A delightfully wonky, ramshackle album with both groove and charm in bucket loads. It arguably laid the template for the punk-indie boom of the 90s.
DISCOGS £44

THE HUMAN LEAGUE
REPRODUCTION
The debut album from the Sheffield synth-pop heroes that perfectly combines their more industrial early leanings with their seamless ability for a pop melody. DISCOGS £9

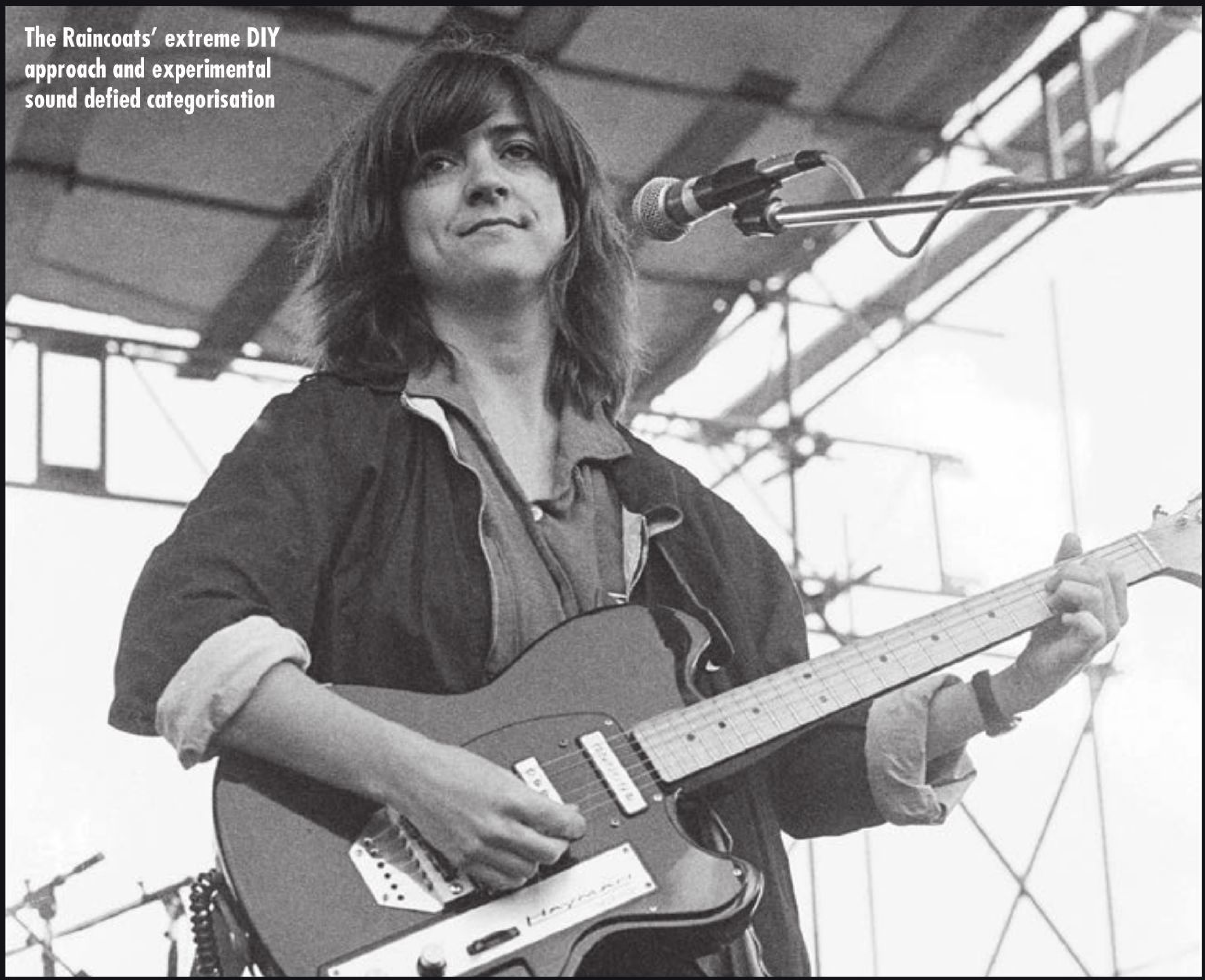
THE FALL
DRAGNET
The second album from Manchester's finest. A wild ride of amphetamine psychosis put to rockabilly beats, itchy guitar and MES' trademark idiosyncratic vocals.
DISCOGS £38

DAVID CORIO/REDFERNS/GETTY

Buzzcocks were always just one pioneering step of the punk crowd

Tension, there was a drum machine in the studio," he remembers. "So there was a feeling of a shift coming into place. Kraftwerk were obviously making an impact and more synths were starting to appear. By the end of the year, there was a real feeling, like a change was going to come." In fact, Diggle suggests that had the Buzzcocks not broken up, they themselves might have ended up moving in this direction. "I got used to using a drum machine for demos, and we were getting into that vein. I think we might have gone a bit more down the electronic route if we had stayed together. We went into the studio with cassettes for what would have been the fourth album and we were working with Martin Rushent, who had just been working with The Human League. Pete [Shelley] went off to demo some songs and that ended up becoming his *Homosapien* album, which was very much Pete moving into the electronic era."

Another shift that took place in Britain that year was a political one. Margaret Thatcher came into power and so began a new era of



The Raincoats' extreme DIY approach and experimental sound defied categorisation

DAVID CORIO/REDFERNS/GETTY

CABARET VOLTAIRE
MIX-UP
Debut album from the hugely influential Sheffield outfit who offer up a mesh of hissing tape experimentations and fractured rhythms.
DISCOGS £20

BUZZCOCKS
A DIFFERENT KIND OF TENSION
The band's prolific output meant that they released their singles compilation *Singles Going Steady* before even releasing this, their third album. Less pop-focused but just as brilliant as ever.
DISCOGS £16

WIRE
154
The end of an often perceived trilogy after 1977's *Pink Flag* and 1978's *Chairs Missing*. Few bands manage to achieve in 30 years what Wire managed to do with these in three.
DISCOGS £26

GANG OF FOUR
ENTERTAINMENT!
A set text of the post-punk canon. An album that owes as much to groove and rhythm as it does anti-rhythm, with lyrics as sharp and cutting as the razor wire guitar lines.
DISCOGS £24

GARY NUMAN
THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE
The album that sent Numan into a new realm of chart-busting pop star, funnelling the electronic genius of Kraftwerk into a British pop framework.
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SIOUXSIE AND THE BANSHEES
JOIN HANDS
The band's second album stripped down the urgent post-punk fire of their debut into a darker, more textural and atmospheric record.
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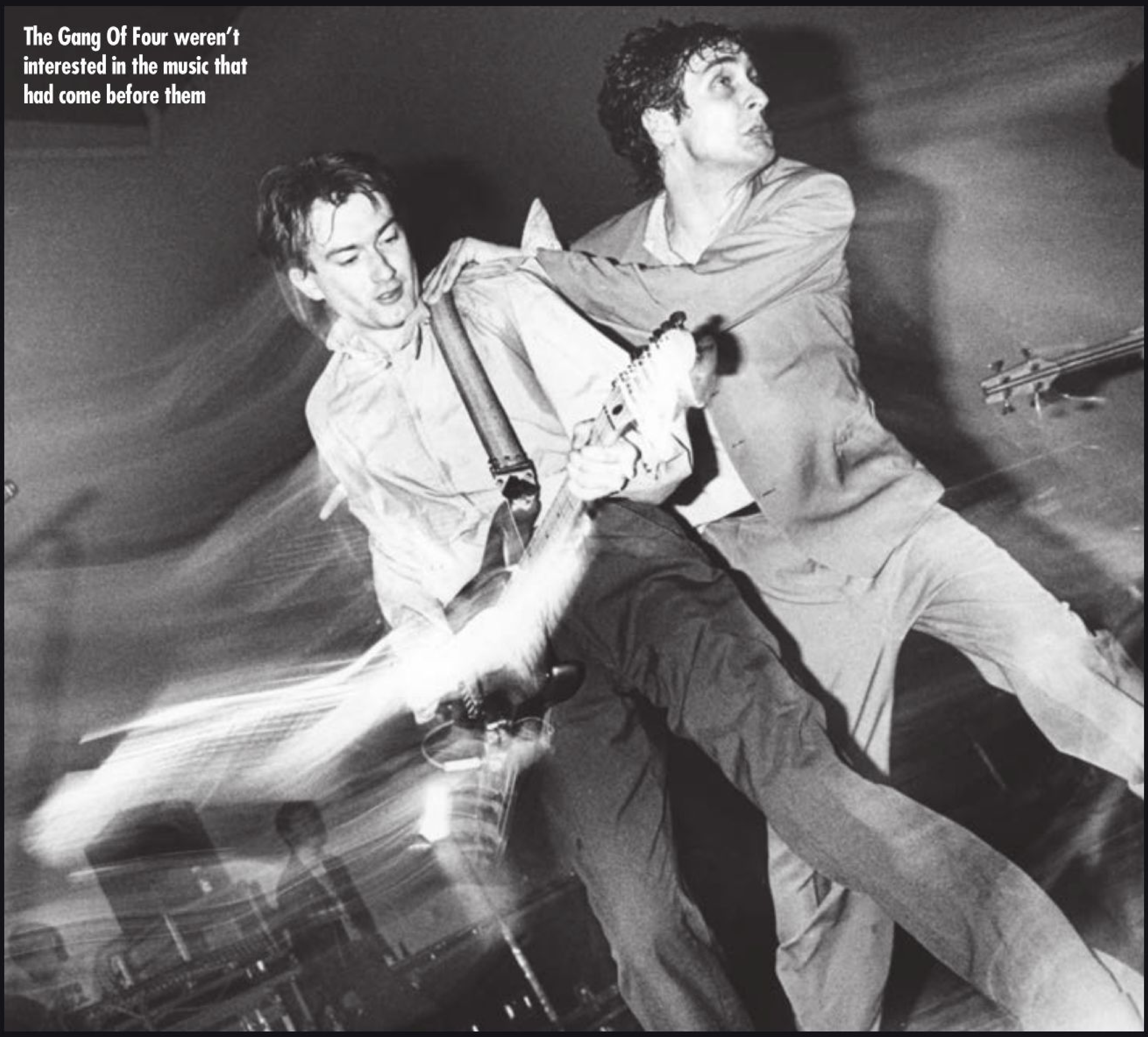
The Gang Of Four weren't interested in the music that had come before them

Conservative rule. Although some of the political music that came that year as a result was not always as direct as some people think. "People often write about *Entertainment*! as being a response to Thatcher, but it wasn't," says Gill. "The political element is more about filtering through how we received that information via TV and the papers. It was about how we get the propaganda. We didn't want to tell people how to think about certain events." Regardless, this sense of outsider camaraderie that Stewart speaks of is one that was no doubt strengthened and emphasised as Thatcher came in and made no secret of her disdain for the sort of people that were making such groundbreaking music. In a political period that became defined by an us versus them attitude, this allowed the brilliant music that was pouring out of Britain to feel like more of a united front.

"Thatcher introduced the era of the greedy right," Stewart says. "To a certain extent, before that you had these patrician Conservatives, but Thatcher and her mates was the beginning of the Conservative oligarchs." Da Silva remembers it having something of a trickling impact. "Things didn't change from one day to the next. Things just went on and on getting worse. Things started getting more professional and money-orientated after that." Da Silva also credits the socio-political backdrop of that era in allowing so much art and unbridled experimentalism to flourish. "Cheap housing was crucial around then," she recalls. "As well as all the squatting that was taking place. It made it a really lively scene and a lot of art came out of that. It later became a lot more difficult to live so cheaply or for free and be surrounded by all this free thinking, art and music."

For Stewart, 1979 was an emblematic year in which the baton of punk had been passed on and then people sprinted off into completely unexpected territories with it. "My philosophy was that punk was a bit like Merseybeat," he says. "Punk was an enabler. It made us want to form a band, but we thought it was about experimenting and challenging everything. Punk blew the doors off and suddenly there was this rainbow of possibilities, you could do anything. It was like landing on another planet." ●

"PUNK WAS AN ENABLER. IT BLEW THE DOORS OFF AND SUDDENLY THERE WAS THIS RAINBOW OF POSSIBILITIES"

THE SLITS
CUT
Another album that celebrated the cross-pollination between dub and punk that also managed to result in something of a benchmark album for diverse genres such as Riot Grrrl. DISCOGS £48

THE POP GROUP
Y
A pinnacle album of experimentation and the result of colliding worlds. Dennis Bovell's dub production and the band's raw, unflinching approach create something truly inimitable. DISCOGS £12

XTC
DRUMS AND WIRES
Three albums in and XTC move into a pop/art-rock framework, utilising production techniques and songwriting styles that would come to define much of the 1980s. DISCOGS £19

JOY DIVISION
UNKNOWN PLEASURES
There's little more that can be said about this album, a landmark release in every sense that became an iconic record sonically and aesthetically. DISCOGS £68

THE CURE
THREE IMAGINARY BOYS
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MAGAZINE
SECONDHAND DAYLIGHT
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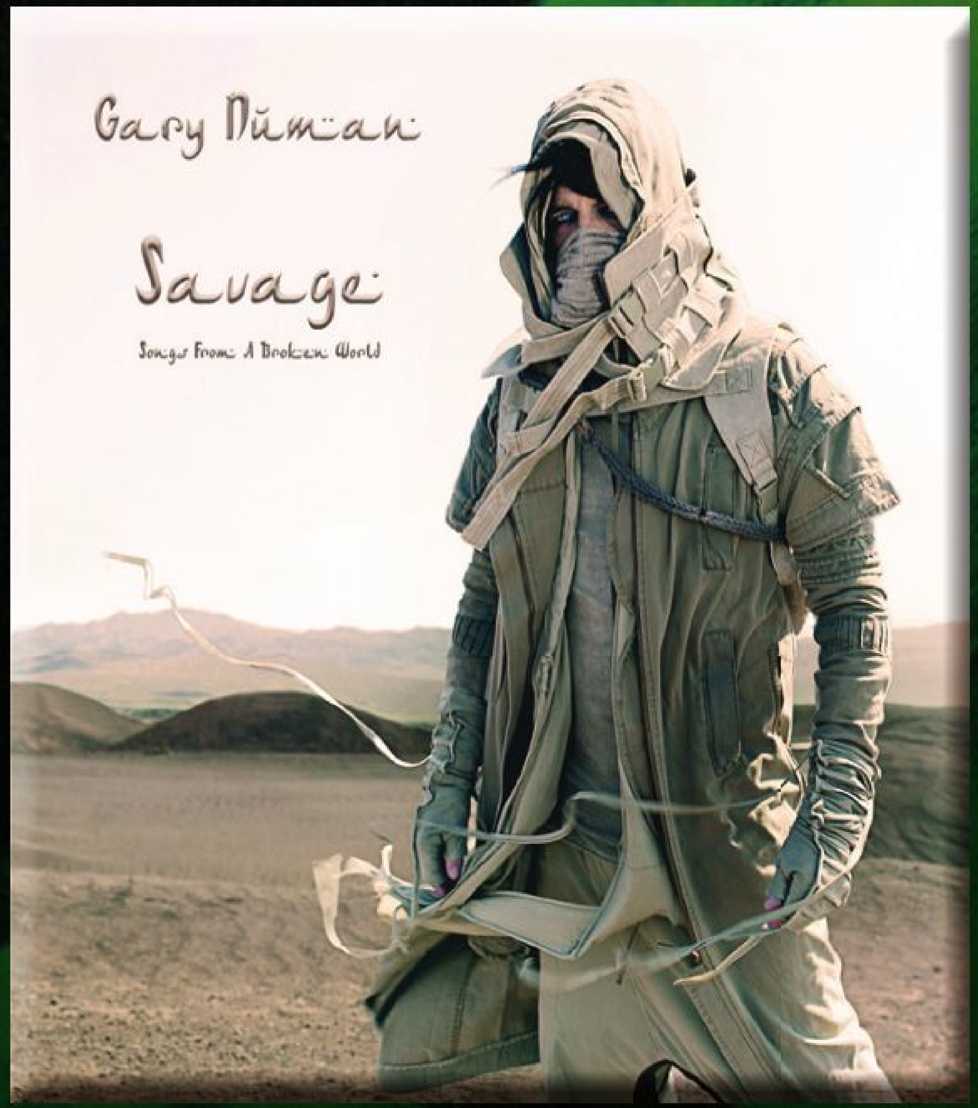
"I'M A MIXTURE OF DRIVE, THE DESIRE FOR PERFECTION AND A STAGGERING LACK OF SELF-CONFIDENCE"

IT'S 40 YEARS SINCE GARY NUMAN DISSOLVED TUBEWAY ARMY AND IMMEDIATELY HAD SOLO SUCCESS WITH CARS. IT'S JUST AS SIGNIFICANT THAT IT'S 25 YEARS SINCE THE ELECTRONIC MUSIC INNOVATOR RESCUED HIS CAREER FROM TOTAL DISASTER. HE TELLS CLASSIC POP ABOUT HOW HE'S AVOIDED SELLING OUT, HIS BATTLES WITH DEPRESSION AND THE DIFFICULTIES OF MAKING NEW MUSIC WHEN THE KIDS ARE HOME…

JOHN EARLS

© Getty Images

Gary Numan happened to wake up early one morning recently. Unable to get back to sleep, at 5.30am he began going through some contracts: Gary has managed his own career for four years. Two hours later, his wife Gemma was woken up by the sound of her husband laughing to himself. "What are you giggling at?" she asked. "In the last two hours, I've sorted 10 things about contracts, tours, a film offer – and I've not got out of bed," Gary told her. "This is what my life is like. Isn't it brilliant!"



To some people, Gary Numan will always be the stern, distant replicant he appeared to be at the start of his career. His lifelong love of science-fiction fed into the black-clad warrior intoning *Are 'Friends' Electric?* and *Cars* as if Kraftwerk were a bit too chirpy, actually. The music has remained ominous – there's a reason Marilyn Manson and Nine Inch Nails leader Trent Reznor are devotees – but the Gary Numan of 2019 is able to celebrate the fact he's spent the past 40 years being singularly, determinedly, totally himself. He's also bloody funny. Hardcore fans already know that: you could tell at the "An Evening With" interview events around most recent album *Savage* in 2017 that Gary is a big Ricky Gervais fan.

He can afford to joke about his career, not least that refusal to sell his soul. "The fans mean everything," he says. "I can be as arrogantly focused about only doing what I want and talk until the cows come home that I won't do nostalgia tours but if nobody comes to see me and the records don't sell, it'd all be for nothing. I'd just be someone talking in a little room to myself with nobody interested."

Savage (Songs From A Broken World) reached No.2 in the UK albums chart, only denied the top spot by Foo Fighters' *Concrete And Gold*, and was Gary's first Top 10 LP since *I, Assassin* reached No.8 way back in 1982. It must make Numan feel like he's riding the crest of a wave now that he's started a new album? "Waves are fragile things," he chuckles. "I've ridden waves before, and I've crashed them spectacularly. The fact that *Savage* was successful doesn't make me feel buoyant about what I do next, it's just extra pressure. I have to raise the bar again. What if the next album only gets to No.5? If you'd asked me before 2017 how I'd feel about a No.5 album, I'd have jumped up and down and thought it was the best thing ever. Now, it'd feel like a step back after a No.2 album. If you're a glass-half-empty person – which, yes, I am! – success only makes the next record harder."

WE TAKE MYSTERY (TO INDIA)

While on his break from touring in 1981, Gary Numan decided to fly around the world as an alternative form of publicity. It worked: he got arrested for spying in India. After making an emergency landing due to a monsoon, Gary and his co-pilot were held for four days by officials in Visakhapatnam.

Gary recalls: "I said I was a pop star flying around the world for adventure, but they asked, 'If you're famous, where are your press cuttings?', as if I'd carry them around in a folder! They thought I might be spying on their local aircraft, and they didn't like it when I said I'd been on a tour of the factory on the Isle Of Wight where the plane they were referring to was made. Then they said I might be smuggling watches, because I wore two of them." It's standard practice for pilots to wear two, one set to local time and one on GMT/UTC. "I said it'd be weird to fly to India in my own plane to smuggle one watch – especially as I was wearing a £1.99 Casio I'd bought at a Texaco service station! It was like the Keystone Cops for real."

The local consulate said Gary was too far away to help. "I was suddenly like a four-year-old, so out of my depth," he says. "The reality of what was happening hit me. I'd been quite cocky up until then, but I shut right up and went along with whatever they said until we were freed."

The morning Gary speaks to *Classic Pop* from his home studio in Los Angeles, he does allow himself to feel happy about that pressure: he'd finally nailed the chorus of new song *Intruder* the night before. "I've been on that chorus for the best part of a month," he frets. "For me, that's pathetic. But it's the first important song of this new album, and it had to be perfect."

It's not so unusual for Gary to finesse a song – *Here In The Black* on 2013's *Splinter (Songs From A Broken Mind)* took him 32 versions. "And the one we went with was the first one we did." For Gary, there are various reasons for this perfectionist streak. "I've a mixture of drive and the desire for perfection, coupled with a staggering lack of self-confidence," he explains. "When I write a song, I feel, 'I must be able to make this better, because I'm not great.'" There are pluses to this attitude – Gary would rather realise a song could be improved than be someone who "thinks they're a fucking genius and throws a song out there because they think, 'That's a great song because *I* wrote it.'"

However, such constant self-doubt can become destructive. "One of the downsides of essentially working alone is getting into a downward spiral," he says. "Doubting everything I do is very easy. There are many songs I've written where I've thought, 'That's brilliant!' when I've written it. But an hour later, I'll think, 'I don't like that lyric' and three hours after that I'll think it's the worst thing ever. It's a real danger. Many years ago, I erased everything I'd done in the previous two years. Not everything I did in that time could have been rubbish, but I was crushed by this feeling that nothing I did seemed good enough. Now, I'm better at talking myself out of it."

Have any of Gary's songs emerged fully-formed and he hasn't doubted them?

The man born Gary Webb picked his stage name from an advert in the *Yellow Pages* for a plumber whose surname was 'Neumann'

© Getty Images

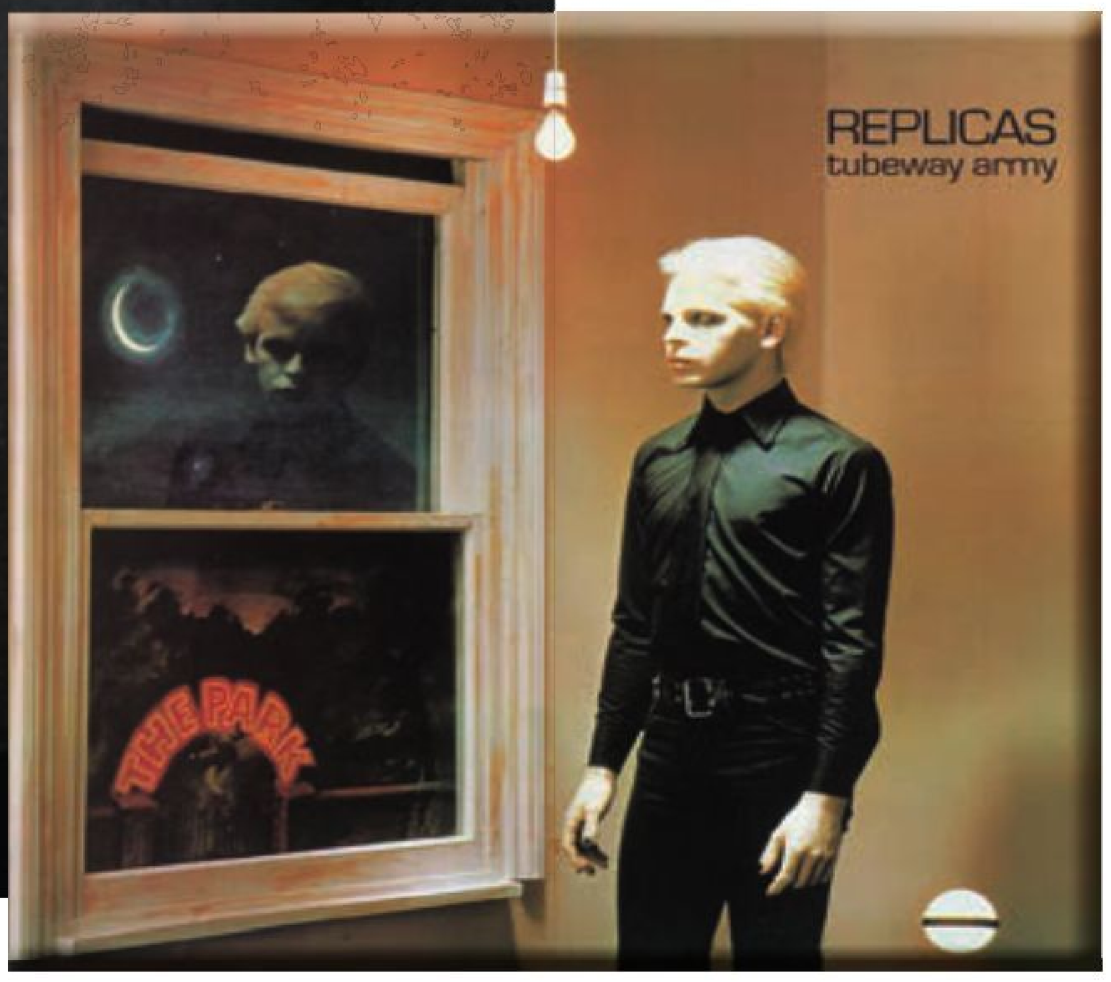
"I DIDN'T TAKE TO TOURING WELL AT ALL. I FELT REALLY VULNERABLE AND THE PRESS WERE JUST HORRIBLE."

"I end up going back to the original idea a lot," he ponders. "Actually, the quickest song I ever wrote was *Cars*." That'll be worldwide No.1 classic *Cars*? "That took 10 minutes. It's such a simple song – it's just one little riff and a big descending keyboard line over the top of it. It doesn't even have a chorus! If *Cars* had taken more than 10 minutes to write, I should have been ashamed of myself."

Don't be fooled into thinking Gary Numan is dismissive of his past. He's not, and his new tour (R)evolution celebrates 40 years since debut solo album *The Pleasure Principle*. As well as *Cars*, that album featured *Metal*, cited by Afrika Bambaataa as an early influence on hip-hop, and *M.E.*, which became the basis of Basement Jaxx's classic *Where's Your Head At*. Gary is quick to point out his tour celebrates 40 years of playing live rather than comprising songs of his early solo era. But he rates *The Pleasure Principle*. Sort of. "When I toured the album on its anniversary 10 years ago, I was pleased to see how unusual its song structures are," he says. "I hadn't realised until then how different those songs are to what else was around at the time. That was a pleasant surprise."

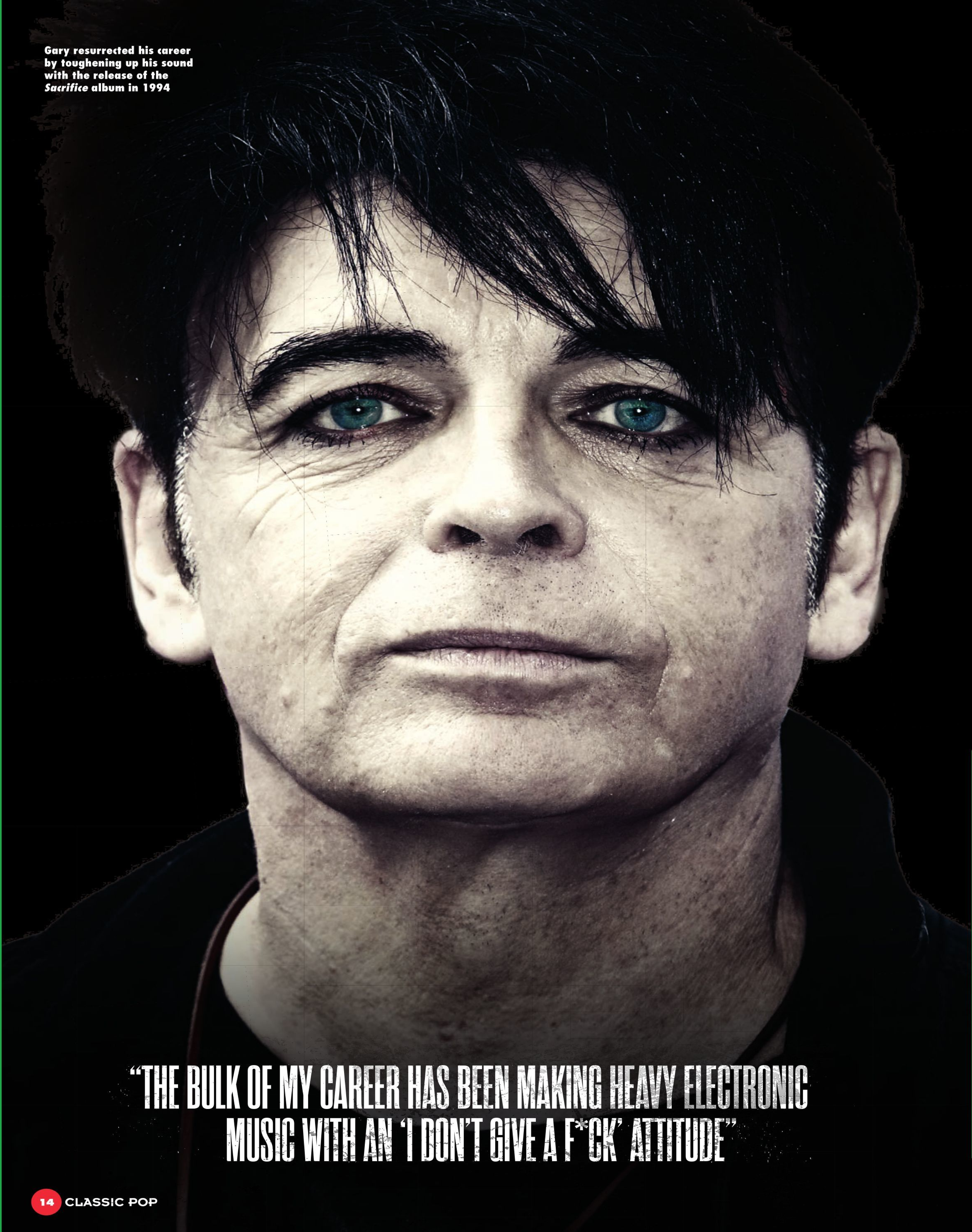
The Pleasure Principle was released just six months after Tubeway Army split, but that wasn't exactly a big deal for Gary. Formed on the punk scene in 1976 and quickly signed to Beggars, Gary wanted out as soon as he visited the band's first studio and saw a synthesiser for the first time. "Tubeway Army was only ever a vehicle for me to get somewhere else," he states. "I was only ever in a band because everyone else was in a band. As soon as I found synthesisers and started making electronic music, I told Beggars I didn't want to be called Tubeway Army anymore." He pauses, aware of how dismissive he sounds towards his former bandmates. "I was acting as if the band was just me," he admits. "That's pretty fucking arrogant! But that shows where my head was at: it's horrible, but it was all about me and where I was going." Frankly, it's a miracle Tubeway Army lasted for two albums. "My attitude was: 'You're my mates. If you want to grab on and come with me, great. But don't misunderstand me: this is about where I'm going musically.' I'd seen punk was finished and I thought the name 'Tubeway Army' overshadowed the new music."

Tubeway Army hadn't even toured, with Gary's first full live shows happening around *The Pleasure Principle*. It was a distressing experience. The press thought that, like these other synthesised upstarts, Gary Numan was a talentless wrecker of real music. Having Asperger's Syndrome means Gary doesn't like making eye-contact with strangers, so being in front of thousands of people felt upsetting. "It was all a bit horrible," he says sadly. "I didn't take to touring well at all. I felt really vulnerable and the press were just horrible. I'd thought touring was going to be exciting, glamorous, fun. It is now, but I had to learn how not to be so frightened, to not care so much about what other people said. There were shows I enjoyed – loads of kids turning up because they like what you do is the good bit! But the overall theme of that tour was to be nervous, anxious and often disappointed."



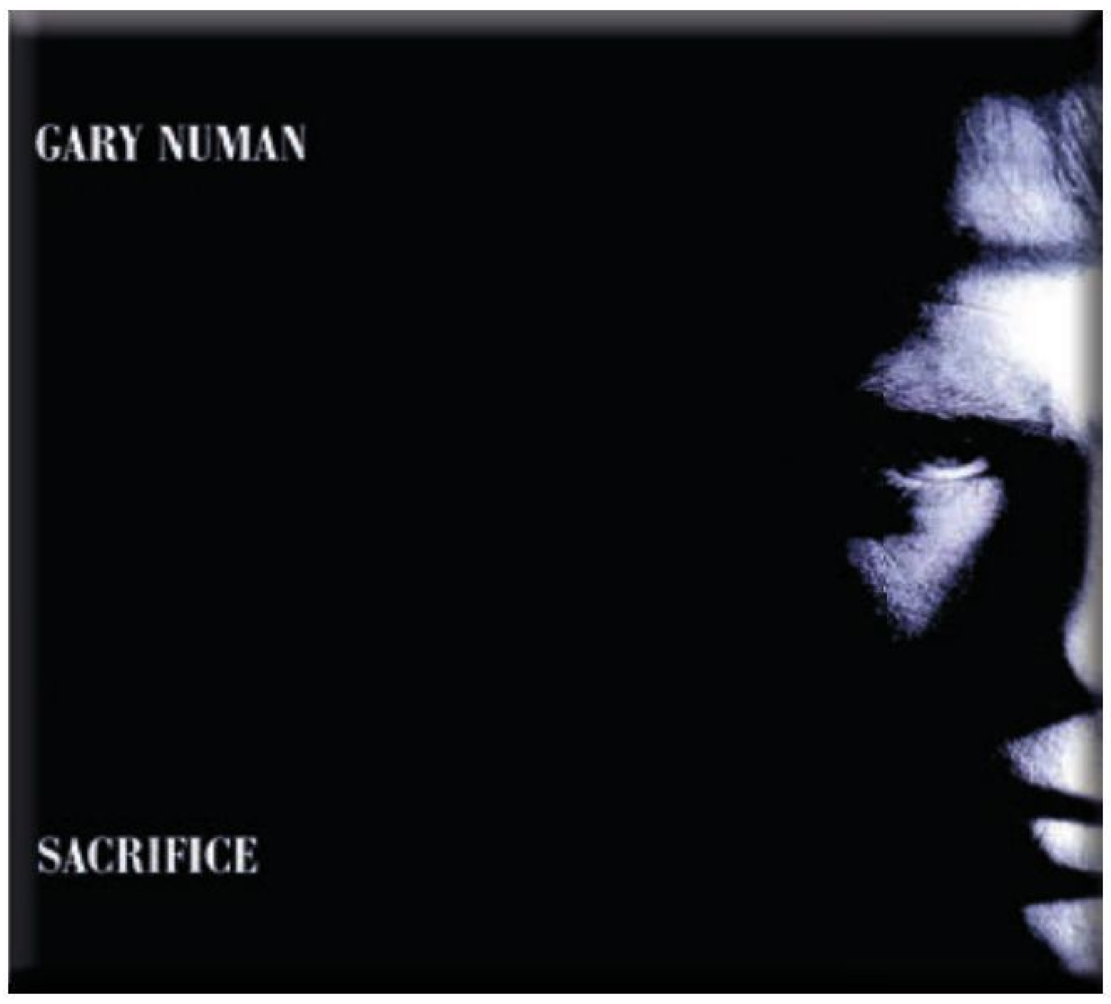
In 1981, after a fraught arena tour for his chart-topping *Telekon* album, Gary announced that he was quitting touring. Asked if any of his 80s peers were supportive, he says: "I remember getting slagged off by a lot of bands, but I don't remember too many being supportive. Maybe I'm being unfair and there might have been, but I don't remember it. I'm not bitter about that, it was just different back then."

He returned to performing 18 months later but, by then, Gary's imperial commercial phase was ebbing away. The rebirth wouldn't happen until his album *Sacrifice* in 1994 marked the start of full-on, heavy, uncompromising electronic music. *Sacrifice* was made at the lowest point possible. "I thought I was finished," he admits. "I had



Gary resurrected his career by toughening up his sound with the release of the *Sacrifice* album in 1994

"THE BULK OF MY CAREER HAS BEEN MAKING HEAVY ELECTRONIC MUSIC WITH AN 'I DON'T GIVE A F*CK' ATTITUDE"



With wife Gemma O'Neil at the Nordoff Robbins O2 Silver Clef Awards earlier this year

no record deal and I was a pariah. The gigs were virtually unworkable, as so few people were turning up. Gigs weren't a joy, they were an embarrassment. My previous album *Machine + Soul* was the worst thing I've ever done, as I had no ideas. There were so many difficulties in my life that I had nothing to say. I was absolutely broke and my house was about to be repossessed. There was no point trying to win the fans back or win record company A&Rs over – I'd tried that – so I treated making music just as a hobby again. I was back to being a teenager, thinking, 'My music can be as dark and as heavy as I like, as nobody's going to play it anyway.' And that resulted in my best album for years. There's a road from *Sacrifice* to the music I make now."

Asked if the 25th anniversary of *Sacrifice* is as significant to Gary as 40 years of touring, there's a rare pause. He's a dream interviewee – funny, thoughtful, polite, eloquent. But Gary hadn't realised until *Classic Pop* brings it up that he's been back on the right path for so long. "Is it 25 years?" he boggles. A delighted laugh travels joyfully down the phone from LA. "Fuck! Woah! It feels like *Sacrifice* was six years ago, but most of my career has come since then. Wow! I've never actually thought that through, that the bulk of my career has been making heavy electronic music with an 'I don't give a fuck' attitude. Ha!" There are few experiences in life for childlike wonder than making Gary Numan's day.

That uncompromising attitude is something Gary partly ascribes to having Asperger's Syndrome. "I'm not saying having Asperger's is easy, and I'm aware of people with it who have more difficulties than I do," he says of the condition. "But I wouldn't change it for a second. Coping with it is a different experience depending on who you're with. I'm lucky to have an amazing wife who helps me enormously with Asperger's." Gary finds social situations difficult, explaining: "I'm not particularly good with that, and Gemma guides me through it. I see the world in a slightly different way – I react differently to the norm. The fact that I react differently sometimes causes upset to people around me, as I don't react to emotional things in the way you'd expect. I feel them just the same, but I don't react the same. That's a small price to pay for the benefit Asperger's brings. It enables me to do this. I can say, 'I don't give a fuck, I just do what I want to do.' I can shut out any problems and compartmentalise things into little boxes."

It's a worldview which extends to Gary's attitude to those early breakthrough years. He has toured his past albums before, but it's rare. "It'd be arrogant not to do the nostalgia thing once in a while," he says. "It keeps the people happy who love the early stuff. I understand why they love it, and thankfully a lot of them are still with me and my current music. At times, it's felt like I was stretching my arm, dragging the fans along with me a bit. But at other times, and especially recently, it hasn't felt like that at all. I'm sure I've got fans who love *Savage* who, a few years ago, would have said, 'I wish he'd do a new album that sounds like *Telekon* again.' But it's got to the stage where I've got the freedom to put the setlist together I want, rather than strategically having to place certain songs in the set to keep the momentum going."

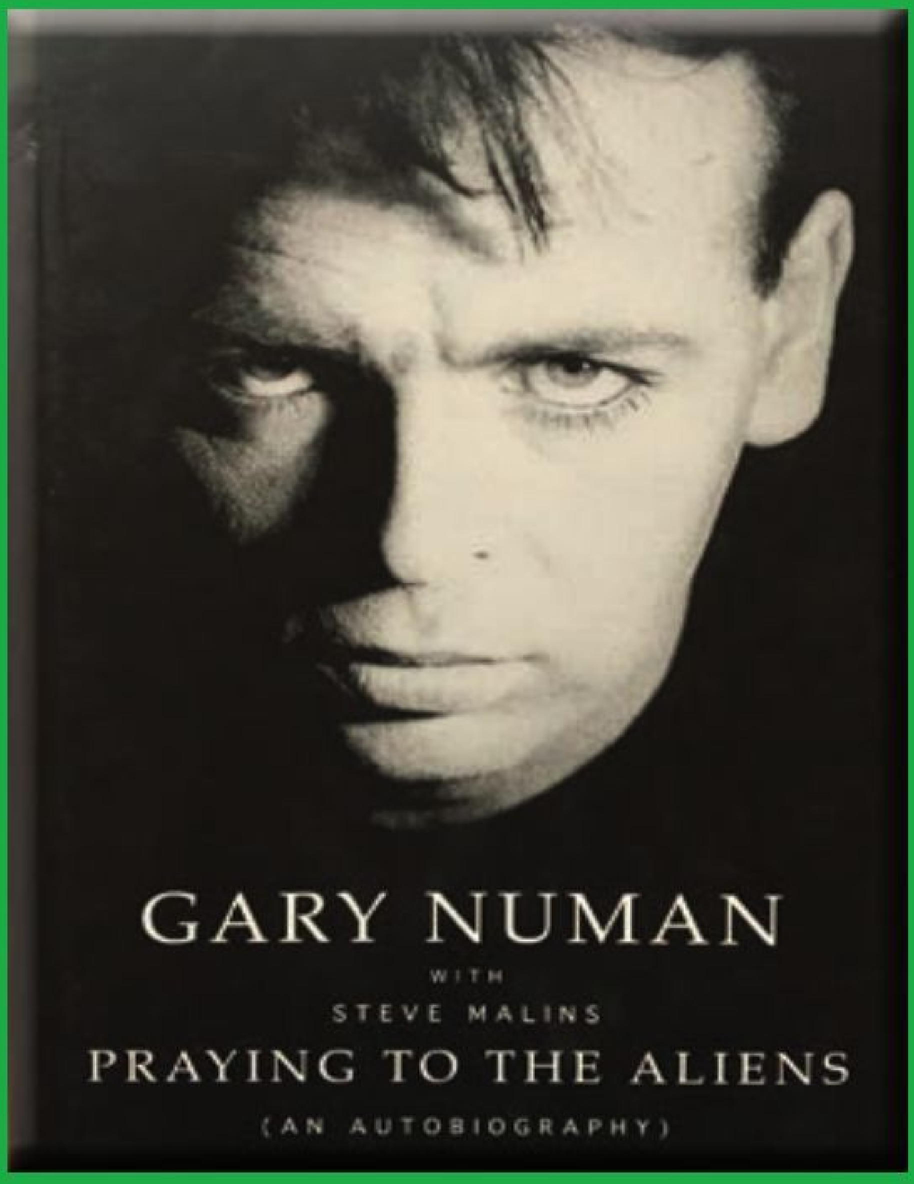
Even at the low ebb before *Sacrifice,* Gary resisted the temptation to remake the early hits. And there were plenty of offers… "There were a few moments along the way where I wobbled," he laughs. "But generally, I'm really proud I've taken the long view of my career. People have said, 'Do a duet on *Cars* with me and I'll give you £20,000' and I think, 'Fuck me, that'd be the kiss of death.' It'd come back to haunt me and undo everything I've been trying to achieve. If I'd done *Are 'Friends' Electric? 1998 Remix*

© Alamy

MY NAME IS BREWING

It wasn't until Gary Numan was 52, in 2010, that he first drank alcohol. "I'm quite a moody person, so I always thought I'd be a vicious and nasty drunk, wanting to fight everybody," he explains. "Then, one night in Mexico City, I got accidentally slaughtered. I was drinking this blue concoction, thinking it was the local version of Red Bull. It tasted of fruit, but it had vodka in it. Rather than get aggressive, I became a bumbling buffoon. I was a giggling blob in the corner who loved everybody. I felt great! That made me back off my anti-drink stance quite a lot."

Gary jokes that he still won't drink socially, as he's never found a drink to match that Mexico City taste. "I still hate the taste of all alcohol," he says. "I don't know what was different about that day – maybe it was a Mexican thing, maybe it's because I didn't know I was drinking. I have a little drink before I go on stage now. It doesn't matter what it is, I just have a little shot of something, washed down with water as the taste is unbearable. It loosens me up, so that my limbs feel a little better, my body is a little looser and I enjoy the gig a little bit more. I could never get wasted again, though, as I'd just fall over all the time."



ALIENS 2

Despite his antipathy towards nostalgia, Gary Numan is ready to look back on his life and consider writing a second volume of his autobiography, to follow *Praying To The Aliens*.

Gary's first memoir was published in 1997, and he says: "It was written pretty much when I was at the bottom of my life, or just after I'd started to come through it. Things were still pretty shit and I was damaged by that. It charted a steady downhill trend from really successful to absolutely fucking awful. That's not the best time to have decided to write my autobiography! Since that book came out, pretty much every day has been better than the one before."

Gary says he "just has to find the time" before starting on the follow-up, explaining: "Another book now would have a much more victorious feel. My career has done better, my life has done better. It'd certainly be a more enjoyable book to write than the first one. The only problem is that I have both an awful memory and a very busy life, so trying to remember the last 25 years of it is a bit daunting. But I'd love to do it, so I could put out a much more positive story than my first book."

"I DON'T SEE WHY ANYONE DOESN'T LISTEN TO WHAT SCIENTISTS ARE SAYING OR JUST LOOK OUT THE WINDOW TO SEE HOW CLEARLY MESSED UP THE CLIMATE IS"

© Getty Images

Numan released his last record *Savage (Songs From A Broken World)* in September 2017. It would go on to peak at No.2 in the UK albums chart.

or whatever, I wouldn't have made *Splinter* or *Savage*. Maybe I'd be sat here looking forward to the next Here & Now-style nostalgia tour, where I'd be singing *Cars, Are 'Friends' Electric?* and one new song nobody wants to hear. The only time I do nostalgia is when I feel the fans are due, but I feel nervous and uncomfortable doing it."

Gary intends releasing his new album – provisionally also called *Intruder* – in September 2020. It continues the ecological themes explored on *Splinter* and *Savage,* as Numan reveals: "The song *Intruder* is as if Earth is talking. If it could speak, what would it say? Would it be seriously angry with what's going on? Would it see us as a misguided ally or as a virus on its surface? That's the thrust of the whole record, though there's a lot more thrust to come. Or I hope so, as it'll be really hard to write 15 songs about one thing! I like heavier electronic music with big choruses, so I know the album will be that sort of music."

Having sung about climate change over his past couple of albums, Gary is unsurprisingly no fan of Donald Trump. "Trump is systematically undoing every environmental protection Obama put in place, for absolutely no gain I can see other than out of spite to attack Obama. On a purely economic level, the amount of jobs and research available from tackling climate change would benefit industry. Trump is an idiot, but the rest of the world isn't doing what it should either. Every time I read the latest scientific report, it's worse: things are going to happen sooner rather than later, it's getting faster… People say, 'It's a natural cycle.' Is it fuck! I don't see why anyone doesn't listen to what scientists are saying or just look out the window to see how clearly messed up the climate is."

Gary needs to finish making *Intruder* by the end of April in order to be released next September. With touring commitments, he won't be ready to really get into it until November. And then there's the family to consider. Gary and Gemma have three daughters aged 12-16. On the day of our interview, Raven, Persia and Echo have friends over and are mucking about in the family swimming pool. "I try very hard to put work and home life together like an intricate jigsaw," says Gary.

"When I'm not touring, I don't want them to notice I'm working at all. When I'm home, I try to drop the kids off at school at 8am, then come home and be in the studio until around 4pm so that, when they come home, I can always be around."

Thankfully, Gary has been able to train his creativity to work during school hours. "When the kids first came along, I wasn't used to it," he laughs. "It'd take me half a day just to tune the world out and tune into any creative ideas. But there isn't the time for that. I realise that's the way it is now. I'm on it pretty much as soon as I sit down."

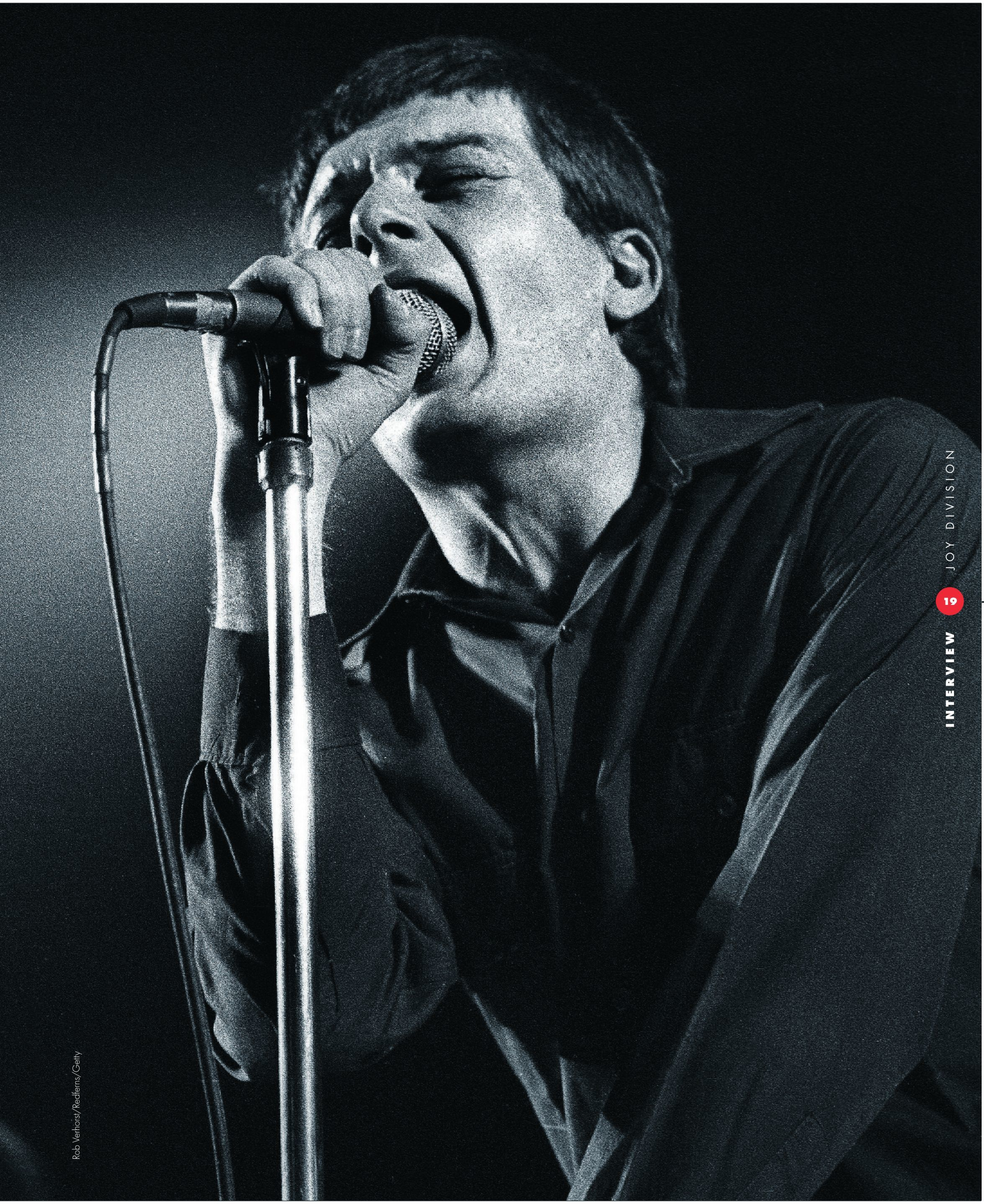
Gary Numan has been mostly on it for 40 years. As long as the planet will let him, he'll keep pushing forward. ■

As the 40th anniversary of Joy Division's *Unknown Pleasures* approaches, Peter Hook tells **Jonathan Wright** about the "wonderful out-of-control excitement" of making one of the best debut albums ever committed to vinyl

Odes To Joy

Over the course of their brief career, Joy Division made just a single appearance on national television. In September 1979, the band performed *Transmission* and *She's Lost Control* on a BBC2 proto-yoof show, *Something Else*. All of the elements that made Joy Division so compelling are in place: skittish drum patterns, the swapping of lead lines between guitar and bass, and a collective demeanour pitched somewhere between nerdy and belligerent. And then there's Ian Curtis, first twitching as he gets lost in the music before dancing like a man possessed, seemingly oblivious to his surroundings.

The contrast between the band's first regional TV appearance, a performance of *Shadowplay* introduced by Tony Wilson for *Granada Reports* a year previously, is slight yet telling, a matter of more confidence, more experience, better clothes even. The Joy Division of autumn 1978 are reaching, rich in promise, but by 1979 they're the finished article, scarily good. As the 40th anniversary of the release of *Unknown Pleasures* approaches, it seems an apposite moment to ask, what alchemy made this possible?


Rob Verhorst/Redferns/Getty

Joy Division were always a powerful live outfit, an aspect of the band that wasn't reflected in the band's masterful debut

Martin O'Neill/Redferns/Getty

"The thing is, probably the worst person you could talk to about it is me because for us it was such a struggle," laughs bassist Peter Hook, speaking down the line from Portugal, where he's playing dates with his band, The Light. "It was a struggle to get on *Something Else* at that time. It was a struggle to survive as a group. It was a struggle to get every gig. You really did feel like you were climbing Everest to get to a support slot with Johnny Thunders and the Heartbreakers, getting paid a tenner. It was a very, very difficult time. You were seizing everything you got. There was nothing about it that was easy."

In part, this was because Joy Division were helping to invent a new way of doing things, out of necessity as much as anything else. Having formed in 1976, Joy Division, initially named The Stiff Kittens – likely at the suggestion of Buzzcocks manager Richard Boon – and then Warsaw, had already recorded a latterly much-bootlegged album for RCA offshoot Grapevine Records in May 1978. They hated the results and, with the help of energetic new manager Rob Gretton, freed themselves from the contract.

Instead of going to another major, Joy Division opted to go the independent route, recording for Tony Wilson's nascent Factory Records, a label financed by an inheritance Wilson received when his mother died. Today, Joy Division's decision doesn't seem surprising, but it has to be seen in the context of the times, when there was near-incredulity at Stiff Little Fingers' debut for Rough Trade, *Inflammable Material* crashing the Top 20 album chart in early 1979. This gave Joy Division autonomy, albeit with an accompanying financial downside. "They had no money to support us," says Hook, "everything was self-financed."

But what Factory did offer was the assistance of a collection of maverick talents, including producer Martin Hannett, who first worked with Joy Division on the band's tracks for the *A Factory Sample* EP. In April 1979, Joy Division and Hannett recorded at Strawberry Studios in Stockport, co-owned by Eric Stewart and Graham Gouldman of 10cc.

It was, says Hook, "a completely alien environment", but there was "a wonderful being-out-of-control excitement" about working in a professional studio. "It even felt more special because you were sneaking in at eight at night, working until eight in the morning, there was a real edge to what you were doing," he remembers. "We had to work unsocial hours because we couldn't afford to work normal hours, it was cheaper at night."

ESCAPE TO THE CENTRE

The Joy Division of this period were already a fearsome live outfit, a band forged in the crucible of punk. Salford school friends Hook and guitarist Bernard Sumner had, after all, been inspired to form Joy Division by attending the Sex Pistols' legendary first

Chris Mills/Redferns/Getty

Honouring The Past

Peter Hook tours with The Light, he says, because, "The thing is, I like to be busy and I like to do lots of things, so this is the consequence." His ambition is to perform every song he recorded with both Joy Division and New Order, and he's well on the way to achieving this.

Of the shows ahead, *Peter Hook Presents Joy Division Orchestrated* at the Albert Hall on 5 July sees Hook join forces with Manchester Camerata and musical director Tim Crooks to re-imagine JD's songs. Similar dates in Australia follow in August. "Listen to *Atmosphere* and *Closer*, says Hook, and you hear a band "emulating an orchestra". In May 2020, to mark 40 years of Joy Division's classic LPs, Hook's band The Light will perform *Unknown Pleasures* and *Closer* in Manchester and London. *For more information, visit: peterhookandthelight.live*

gig, at Manchester's Lesser Free Trade Hall, on 4 June 1976. Ian Curtis attended the Pistols' second gig at the same venue, on 20 July. Both shows were arranged by Howard Devoto and Pete Shelley of Buzzcocks. The Sex Pistols and The Clash, says Hook, were his heroes.

"We wanted to be a balls-out punk group, striding round, wall-of-sound type of thing," he says. "And Martin recognised the delicacy and the depth in our songs, and told us in no uncertain terms that we were wrong, this was the way to do it, as we didn't know our arse from our elbow. Because we'd never done it before. Luckily, he had the foresight to recognise what Joy Division was about, because we didn't, we literally didn't have a fricking clue."

The importance of Hannett, who "ruled by chaos and fear" and "certainly wasn't a *nice* teacher", to Joy Division's sound is crystal clear. The icy sheen he gave to the drums of Stephen Morris, for example, with the snap of the snare emphasised, changed how records sounded forever, yet it's important to realise that Hannett was working with a band that had already begun to define themselves. To return to that *Granada Reports* performance, the elements are in place, in particular the material, honed through rehearsal and gigging. "He didn't change the songs," says Hook, who was initially very unhappy with how the album sounded. "What he did was he changed your perception of how they sounded."

Yet in one sense, *Unknown Pleasures* was a classic punk album, in that it was about escape. Joy Division, Hook points out, were a Salford band, which has always been "Manchester's poorer cousin". Which in the late 1970s meant it was grim. "We were just growing into adulthood, scared to death, the nihilism of punk was the perfect antidote to the confusion we felt," he says. Yet rather than rage at the bleakness of their surroundings, captured in so many chilly images of the band, *Unknown Pleasures* turned this energy inwards, a shift emphasised by opener *Disorder*: "I've been waiting for a guide to come and take me by the hand/ Could these sensations make me feel the pleasures of a normal man?"

"It was very indirect," says Hook. "A lot of punk albums were very direct weren't they? 'It's shit, you're a shit, you're a twat, let's get out, fuck off, bahhhh!' Yet Joy Division were creating a landscape. We enabled you to dream about what you'd do when you'd got out. Punk was like someone screaming at you to get off a bus: 'Get off you fucking bastard!' And ours was, 'We're going to get off this bus and we're going to go somewhere wonderful'. That's to me what the equivalent of punk against Joy Division was. You were going to go somewhere, but you were going to go somewhere much dreamier, and from that

The Pistols' gigs at Manchester's Lesser Free Trade Hall inspired the group to form

No Love Lost...

Joy Division's four-person line-up came together in August 1977, when Stephen Morris joined the band after replying to an advert in a music shop. After Ian Curtis' death in May 1980, the evolution into New Order continued with the addition of keyboardist Gillian Gilbert. These days, says Hook, he's "not friends, shall we say" with his former bandmates, "and yet we did create some sublime moments together that we couldn't have done without each other. I'm hoping, maybe, some time in the future we'll all realise that and be able to enjoy it, and show a little bit of respect and courtesy to each other." It's a shame isn't it? "It is a great shame. It's very sad. Especially at this age. My best mate said to me the other day, he said, 'Hooky, if you don't watch it you're going to be taking this to your grave'. And I was like, 'Shit, what a thought'."

much more powerful and much more open than someone screaming at you."

This image of Joy Division as opening up possibilities is one that's worth pausing upon. Because of the suicide of Ian Curtis, the band's story is often told as a tragedy, to the extent it's difficult not to see a track such as *She's Lost Control*, about a young and severely epileptic woman Curtis encountered when he worked at Macclesfield occupational rehabilitation centre, as somehow foreshadowing what would happen.

And yet Joy Division's story is also about optimism, about the special magic of four disparate characters where the sum was far greater than the constituent parts. Yes, Ian Curtis was a troubled autodidact inspired by Iggy Pop and Berlin-era Bowie, and the writings of JG Ballard, William S Burroughs and Fyodor Dostoevsky.

But he was also the man who, before the band signed to Factory, demanded Tony Wilson put Joy Division on TV. "He was driven, he was so ambitious and he wouldn't let anybody get in his way," says Hook. "Storming up to Tony Wilson and calling him a cunt. 'You fucking should have us on your fucking programme, you wanker, because we are the fucking best thing since sliced bread!'" Curtis the introvert, encouraged to express his "naughty, laddie side" by Hook and Sumner, often acted as Joy Division's cheerleader.

"Ian Curtis was a great one for saying to you, 'We are fantastic, the world will catch up, and all we've got to do is just buckle down, stick with it and we'll be fine'," says Hook. "Because when you can't get a gig as a group, it's the most disheartening feeling in the world, you

"We wanted to be a balls-out punk group, striding round, wall-of-sound type of thing. We didn't know our arse from our elbow..."

just want to give up. You're working so hard under such awful conditions. *Unknown Pleasures* was written in something like minus five degrees in a warehouse where your hands were blue with the cold. It was a real struggle to write under those circumstances, but we did it."

INTO THE WORLD

On 15 June 1979, *Unknown Pleasures* was released. Its cover featured an image of radio waves from the pulsar CP 1919 that Bernard Sumner had found in The *Cambridge Encyclopaedia Of Astronomy*. Designer Peter Saville reversed the image from black-on-white to white-on-black, while initial sleeves were printed on textured card. It not only sounded special, it looked special. This was something new.

More prosaically, Factory pressed up 10,000 copies, which Hook and Rob Gretton personally picked up from the pressing plant in London and took back to Manchester. The records had to be lugged up three flights of stairs to the Palatine Road flat of Factory director Alan Erasmus while, according to Hook's autobiography, *Unknown Pleasures: Inside Joy Division*, actor Margi Clarke (*Letter To Brezhnev*) noisily had sex with his flatmate in the bedroom.

On 20 July 1979, Joy Division made their second television performance, again on Granada, performing *She's Lost Control* on *What's On*. Later that month, the band recorded *Transmission* at Strawberry, which would be released in October. In September, the band performed at the Futurama Festival in Leeds, an event that also featured the post-punk likes of PiL, OMD, Echo & The Bunnymen and The Fall. By the end of the year, Joy Division had also recorded *Dead Souls*, *Atmosphere* and a John Peel session that featured *Love Will Tear Us Apart* and tracks from *Closer* (Hook rates the record among his favourites by any artist: "It's almost the mirror opposite of *Unknown Pleasures*, yet they go together really well because they show a group that is growing up, that is facing things in the world that are difficult"), songs that showed them moving further still from their punk roots.

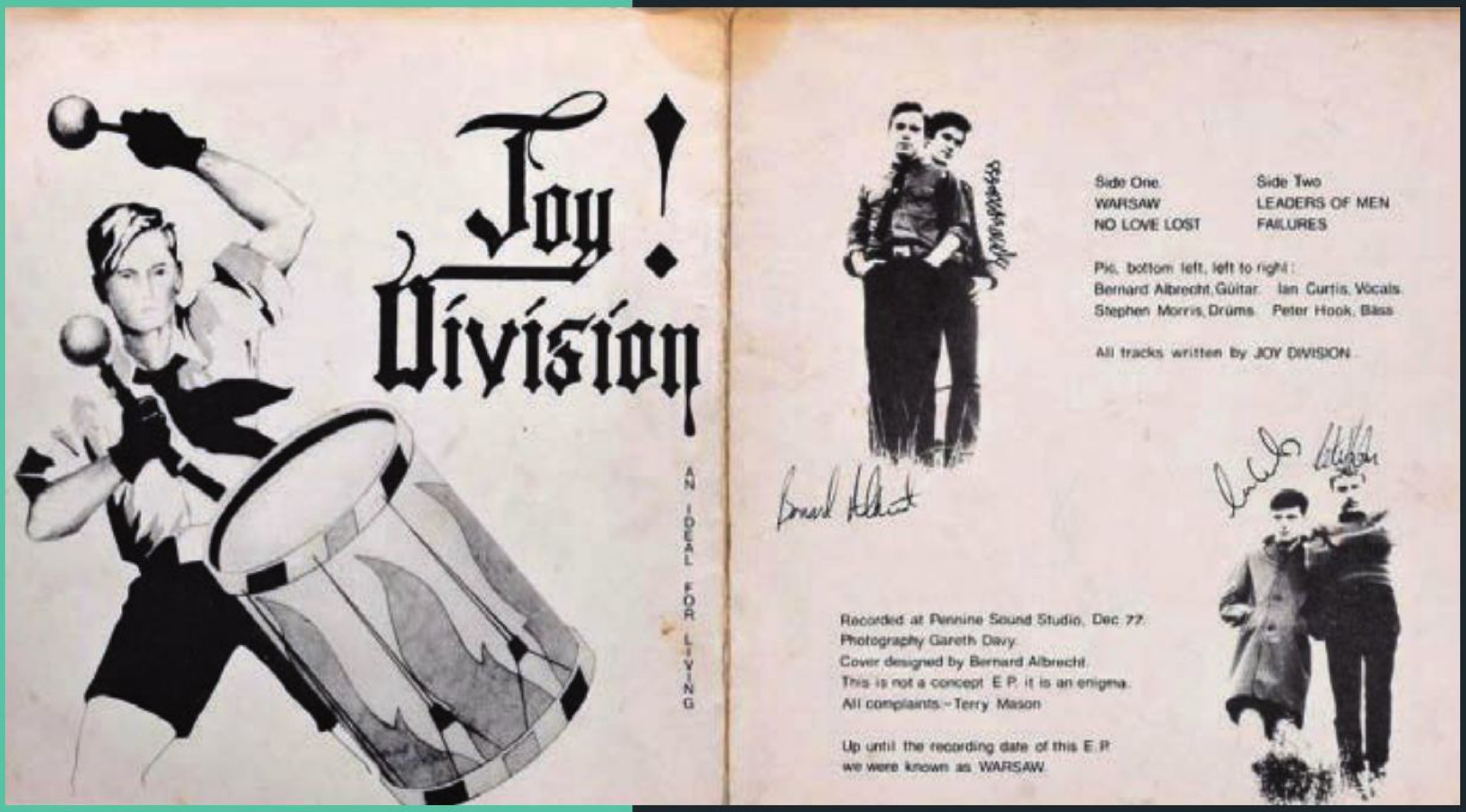
Then there was the October 1979 tour with Buzzcocks, mentors Joy Division had in truth begun to eclipse. Throughout, this was a band operating on a shoestring. "The Buzzcocks were playing to big audiences, so instead of these horrible toilets that you normally got changed in, you were actually in a modicum of comfort," says Hook. "I do remember being very hungry because we were only on £1.50 a day and, the Buzzcocks, they actually employed a minder to keep us out of their dressing room because we were so hungry, we were eating the whole fucking place, table cloth and all."

Hook laughs as he tells this anecdote, as he does often while he talks, a reflection perhaps that he's comfortable in his own skin after quitting booze and drugs several years back. Nevertheless, there's inevitably also regret. On 23 January 1979, Curtis had been diagnosed with epilepsy and, even as Joy Division became more successful, there was a sense that Curtis shouldn't be performing in a band at all, with gigs – played with austere lighting so as not to trigger Curtis's condition, sometimes interrupted by fits.

"He wanted you to be great and he wanted you to have a great time, much more so than himself," says Hook. "He was not selfish at all and that led to his undoing because his lack of selfishness, his lack of interest in looking after himself, because he was always about making everyone else happy, led to his demise. We all know now that if you don't look after yourself, you're not going to be able to look after anybody else."

But they were so young. "We were really young, stupid, ill-educated, especially with regards to epilepsy," says Hook. "It was terrible, but there were older people there. We sort of blame ourselves. I still blame myself in many ways for his suicide, but you have to remember that there were doctors, specialists, parents, loads of people, so many people around Ian, and they were unable to help him either. It's about responsibility, isn't it?"

Things were moving fast, too fast as it turned out. Within a few months, Curtis, both his personal and professional lives in turmoil, would commit suicide. The music, though, endures. "Really, we had it all and yet we had nothing," says Hook. "We had the talent, we had the songs, we had the image, we were going to change the world. None of us knew that we had everything we needed in our arsenal and yet as people, as a group, we had absolutely nothing, we had no material wealth, we certainly had no audience wealth. It was actually quite a wonderfully naïve, innocent period." ●



A Means To An End

In March, Peter Hook sold off his Joy Division memorabilia, including a fully signed copy of the band's first 7" EP, *An Ideal For Living*, that fetched £11,800. "It's always good for your soul to tidy anything up," he says. "When I went down to look at all the Joy Division stuff, when it was just a massive pile in the corner of my lock-up, I was going, 'Oh my god'. It took me a year and a half to sort it out and then I realised that underneath that was a beautiful history, a wonderful story waiting to be told."

One item was withdrawn from the sale, letters written by Ian Curtis to Annik Honoré (1957-2014), with whom the singer was having an affair as his marriage to Deborah Curtis foundered, and which Honoré sent to Hook when the documentary *Joy Division* (2007) was being made. Both Stephen Morris and Bernard Sumner were critical of Hook for putting the correspondence in the auction. Even now, Hook is uncertain what to do with the letters.

"What the fuck am I supposed to do with these?" he says. "I couldn't imagine letting somebody have them, they were so personal, but I couldn't imagine getting rid of them or locking them away because they're so beautiful. It was Ian's way of escaping the group, if you like, which is sad. This was his chance to come into the light. He was starting a new life with Annik and he was going off into the world."

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“In the world of Wire there always has to be a sense that things are moving forward, and that you’re thinking differently”

With their debut album, *Pink Flag*, hitting the racks back in November 1977, post-punk vets Wire are still as experimental, unpredictable and relentlessly forward-looking as ever. Huw Baines discovers a vital band who are 17 albums in and still fine-tuning their process

MATIAS CORRAL

Plenty of bands have been eaten alive by narratives that attack their work from the outside. Under that sort of scrutiny, records with individual merits can become little more than trite comeback stories, visits to the last chance saloon, or meek attempts at recreating former glories. Wire have been navigating that reality for more than four decades.

Ever since their *Chairs Missing* LP upended the apple cart in 1978, reconfiguring the short, sharp shock of their seminal debut *Pink Flag* into dub-inflected post-punk walkabouts, the expectation has been that each subsequent release would provide similar refinements. Where most bands are seemingly honour-bound to churn out the same thing over and over again to satisfy their fanbase, Wire must continually find new avenues to stroll down.

“If a band’s been around for a while, there are two ways to handle it,” guitarist and vocalist Colin Newman says. “The way the majority handle it is basically to say, ‘Oh well, it was all in the past and we’ll live off that’. If you’re trying to do something contemporary, or coming back from having been away, the absolute number one thing you can’t be is shit.

“It’s all about emotional and physical investment. Figuring out what it is that makes that thing tick, and trying to get to something about how that works within the contemporary domain. Every Wire record is an experiment about how you make a Wire record. A certain amount of the methodology stays the same, but a lot of the thinking around what it is that you’re doing and the way that you do it is being constantly revised.”

Wire's latest surge into the unknown is called *Mind Hive*. It's a fascinating piece that offers a different view of their creative desires to the one *Silver/Lead*'s more streamlined indie-rock presented us with in 2017. It ducks and weaves against existing preconceptions by repurposing elements from the band's past and setting them against a pronounced synth base that serves as the chugging, mechanical inverse of 1990's *Manscape* album. Held in its grasp are moments of playful melody and brooding atmospherics, forays into indie-pop and sombre, almost prog-leaning, pastoral passages.

"*Mind Hive* has a greater number of pieces that I started in the studio that are not based on guitar," Newman says. "Rob [Grey, drums] decided that this time around it might be easier for us if he plays to a click, which does make it slightly more fiddly when you start a piece because you can't just play. But it certainly made working with it off the back end way easier.

"It may seem like nothing to others, but in the world of Wire there always has to be a sense that things are moving forward, and that you're thinking differently about the pieces and how you go about the whole thing. But we're not stupid enough that we'd start a massive experiment and throw away everything that we've learned."

VINTAGE WORDS

Having spent 2018 working on reissues of their first three albums (a trio completed by their 1979 masterpiece *154*) and with a career-spanning documentary called *People In A Film* set to follow late in 2020, *Mind Hive* lands at an important time for the band. These days, they are in a rarefied position as the financial beneficiaries from their catalogue, and as a result they could easily give in to sweet, sticky nostalgia. But Newman insists that these backwards glances are only fleeting.

"It could put us in a situation where we're like, 'Why are we bothering with all our new stuff?'," he says. "Really, the lifeblood of the band is new material, and it always has been. In January 1978, the month after *Pink Flag* came out, there's a bootleg from somewhere by the sea in Britain and we're playing a set with like four things off *Pink Flag*. In a way, there's nothing new going on here."

> **"Every Wire record has always been an experiment about how to make a Wire record"**

One element of *Mind Hive* that cannily underscores that attitude is the opening song, *Be Like Them*. It finds Newman repurposing a lyric written by bassist Graham Lewis in the late 70s. Having failed to turn it into anything of note 40 years ago, he has now sculpted it into something vivid and exciting. The song churns and rumbles, riding a thudding, percussive riff into a quietly melodic chorus that drips with irony. "Nothing new about that," Newman spits.

Lewis's vintage words allow us to assess modern-day Wire from an unusual angle. Captured in amber, these are the thoughts of a person in their mid-20s who is trying out new approaches at a rapid clip while the band around them shapeshifts. They're delivered, though, by a man in his mid-60s. "It's a very different Graham voice to how he would write now," Newman admits. "It's much less considered, and more personal. In some ways, it's a young man's view of the world, which is nice to incorporate because why should we always be putting across the viewpoint of people in their dotage?

"We don't think like that. I think people could identify with that – being forced to conform and think like you're supposed to. You could extrapolate it to now. People of our age are expected to have a certain set of political views, which I certainly don't have. My political thinking is much more like young people, because I care about the future."

Reinforcing that idea is the bleak *Shadows*, which plays an important role in *Mind Hive*'s overall tone and ambience. Here, Wire drop the listener into an unwelcoming present as Lewis paints dystopian vignettes that might eerily have been cribbed from the nightly news, equating the path we're currently walking with the road to past atrocities: "The men are lined up and shot into graves. The children are murdered, the women enslaved. Shadow of the future, shadow of the past."

"That's a very contemporary Graham lyric," Newman observes. "It's political, you can imagine situations like that. I think at times all of us can have quite dark views about how the future might unfold for mankind, on the course we're heading. In a way, it's the most downbeat piece on the album. It was something we wanted to have on the record and the placement of it was quite difficult."

WONKY POWER POP

As Newman alludes to here, a great deal of thought has been given to how *Mind Hive* unfolds. He quietly confesses that Wire remain more likely to sell a CD than a slab of wax, but the record was sequenced with vinyl in mind. The lion's share of the work fell to guitarist Matthew Simms, who has been playing with the group for almost a decade after taking the reins from founding member Bruce Gilbert.

Colouring Outside The Lines

Pink Flag established Wire as a band who got to the point quickly. That impression didn't stick for more than a few months, but the truth is that their songs have generally been uniform in length: two, three or four minutes. The anomalies in their catalogue that push running times up towards prog territory, *Boiling Boy*, *Sleep-Walking*, *Torch It!*, plus a few more, are all the more obvious for that reason.

At a shade below eight minutes, *Hung* is the latest of these sore thumbs, and it's also one of Wire's most vital extended pieces. It's long, yes, but it's not aimless. Nor is it self-indulgent. Its broad canvas is heavy and sharp-witted throughout, its shuddering momentum setting the scene for *Humming*'s sublime dissolve. It's Wire breaking open form to get at further meaning, jettisoning a few more preconceptions along the way.

"Wire have always been comfortable with multiple aesthetics," Newman says. "We don't think like a band that only existed in the independent era. There seemed to be a point in the 80s when bands started self-defining in what I've always thought were quite narrow ways: 'we're this kind of group so we're only allowed to do these kinds of things'. What happened to the idea that it's just an artistic exploration? Nobody sat down and said, 'We need to go in a more electronic direction, guys. This is what the focus group told us to do'."

Still standing (from l to r): Matt Simms, Colin Newman, Graham Lewis and Rob Grey

The LP's first gambit is its pop side, which bounces through the addictively wonky power pop of *Cactused* and the sublime *Off The Beach* on its way to a shuddering stop. What initially appeared to be an investigation of Wire's melodic structures is then overtaken by something altogether more difficult and alienating.

Shadows opens the second segment, which subsequently leans hard into *Mind Hive*'s reluctant black heart. "It was interesting that Matt brought that concept," Newman says. "It's a way of categorising the material, and saying, 'OK, if this is the darker side, let's start with the darkest song'. That gives a kind of lead in to what follows."

RAZOR-SHARP EDITING SCALPEL

Even at this stage of their career, Wire's four members found room to disagree over the finer details. That perhaps says something about why they remain a compelling proposition, capable of producing work they feel is worth fighting over 17 albums into the whole endeavour. The monstrous, near eight-minute *Hung*, a rarity in their catalogue as a song that has been allowed to sprawl, was perhaps destined to provide a sticking point.

Newman felt that it should cede the floor to the elegiac *Humming*, which revolves around the profoundly affecting hook "Someone was humming a popular song" as *Mind Hive*'s final statement, and he won. "*Hung* was always going to be difficult," he says. "Everyone thought we should start with *Be Like Them*, and I felt quite strongly that we should finish with *Humming* and not with *Hung*. The idea was for it to disappear into noise, disappear into beauty. Then the calmness and the sense of pathos and loss that comes from *Humming* is heightened."

When excised from the running order, *Humming* is also an interesting case study as far as Wire's razor-sharp editing scalpel is concerned. Newman speaks of refining each song to bring out the best in it, with egos being set aside. The song began life underpinned with a drumkit and a rhythm guitar line. Both he and Grey had to accept their contributions falling to the cutting room floor.

"It's not like 'we don't need a drummer'," he says. "But by taking those things out, it didn't lose its poignancy somehow. It is, ultimately, about how the pieces feel. *Off The Beach* also went through a huge transition. It started off as being almost punk rock. In the end, as I worked on it, it was like, 'It has to become lighter, more jangly, more acoustic, more pop'. There's what we play together, then I work on a refinement, then we come back together and people have other ideas, then that gets brought in, and then I finish it off.

"Matt came over for a session and we did some brutal editing that I wouldn't necessarily do. When I'm working on my own on the record I'm not thinking, 'Now I've got it and I don't care what anyone else thinks'. It's like I've got the band on my shoulder. I'm not going to try and do stuff that is way outside of what we decided. But when there's two of us, it's easier. We're listening to it together and thinking, 'No, that's what it needs'."

Wire have been at it since London's pubs rattled to the sound of punk's first wave, but unlike so many of their contemporaries, they're still here. They're still standing, and still discussing their music in terms of need. *Mind Hive* will delight the old breed who have traced each about face in the band's history, and it liberally provides that crucial ingredient to set them back on their heels again: new sounds that aren't shit.

The day that Wire stop trying to figure out something about themselves through their music will be the day one of punk's most important stories ends. But that's one fear we can set aside for now. "Everything changes all the time," Newman says, and he's not wrong. ●

Live Wire: don't turn up to a gig expecting a greatest hits setlist

ANNETTE GREEN GIULIANA COVELLA

Assorted members of The Selecter, Madness and The Specials congregate on the beach at Brighton during the 2 Tone tour, October 1979

SPECIAL FORCES

As the embers of punk faded, 2 Tone's message of unity shone bright, offering hope to a generation lost. Forty years on, **Dan Biggane** talks to its prime players: Jerry Dammers, Lynval Golding and Neville Staple of The Specials, The Selecter's Pauline Black and The Beat's Ranking Roger, to tell the full story of a label that morphed into a whole genre

Getty

Sandwiched between the fury of punk and the flamboyant new romantics, 2 Tone was the DIY indie label whose roster of bands not only raised questions regarding social ills but offered solutions. Bursting out of the deprived city streets of Coventry, The Specials and The Selecter were joined by Birmingham's The Beat and London's Madness to lead a ska revival that reflected a nation's anxieties in Thatcher's Britain.

At the heart of the musical movement was Jerry Dammers. "I grew up with The Beatles, Stones, Kinks, but The Who and Small Faces were my favourites," Jerry tells *Long Live Vinyl*. "But I also loved soul, Otis Redding, Aretha Franklin, Stax and Motown. When I was about 10, inspired by all that incredible music, I started writing songs. I got into reggae around 1970 when hits like *Liquidator* and *The Israelites* were in the charts. Around 1977, I was at art college in Coventry but paying my dues in a funky soul outfit from Birmingham called The Cissy Stone Band. I couldn't persuade them to do any of my songs, which were quite soulful. Suddenly, punk happened and it turned everything upside down. I spiked and bleached my hair, some peroxide got on my eyebrows, so I bleached them too. I looked like a Thunderbirds puppet, and it didn't quite go with the one-piece zip-up jumpsuits we had to wear in the band. I was so fed up with only doing covers that I started bashing my elbows on the keyboards. Afterwards, I was asked to leave the band, so I knew the time had come to form my own band.

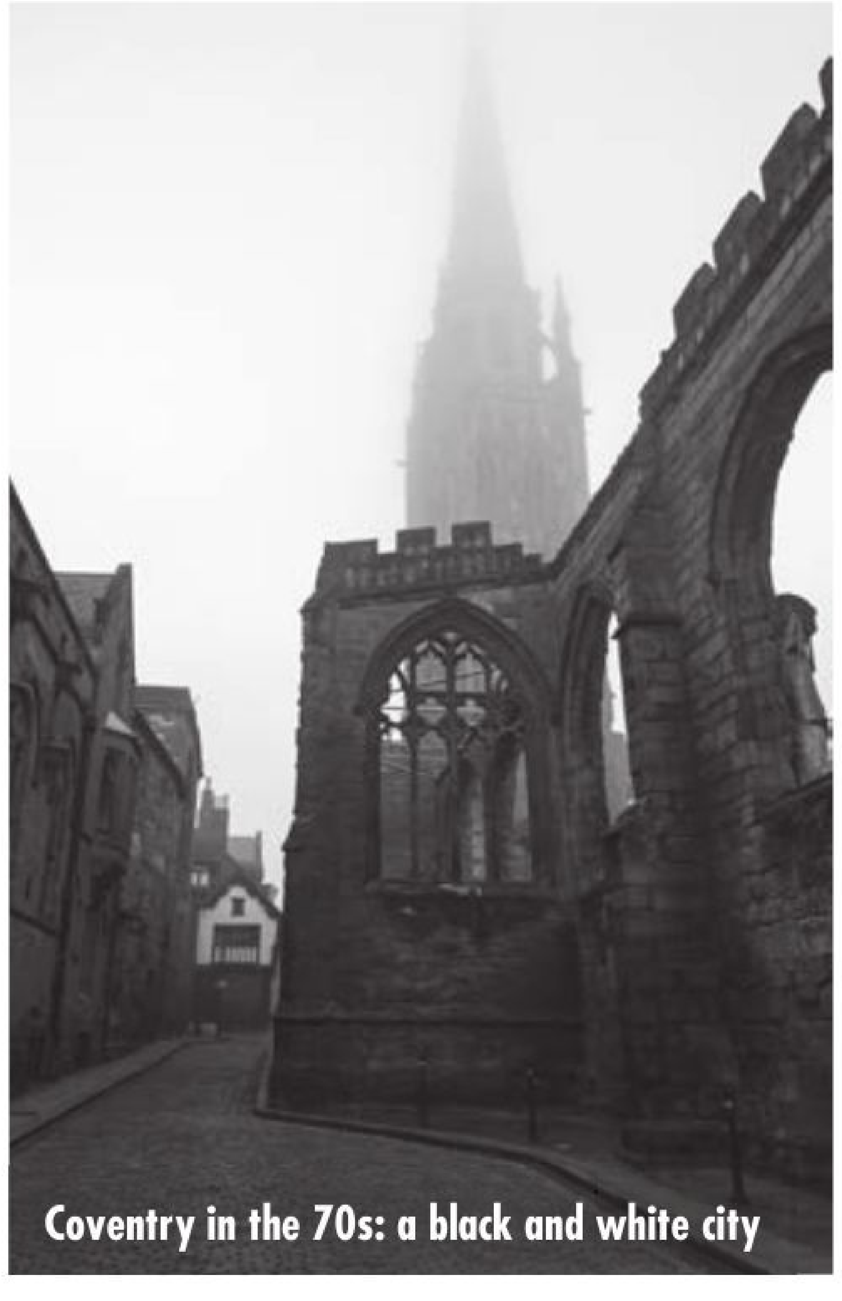
"My friend Neol Davies had a Revox tape recorder and he let me record some songs. Reggae was always part of my plan and I recorded a reggae-ish track for the soundtrack of an animated film I made at college. Horace Panter played bass on it and that was the first thing we did together. I also had lyrics for that tune, which eventually became *Nite Klub*.

"Charlie Anderson, H and the other guys who later became The Selecter had a reggae band called Hard Top 22 in Coventry, and I played keyboards with them for a while. The most popular punk band in the city were Squad, who Terry Hall sang with. Meanwhile, Lynval Golding and Desmond Brown were playing covers with soul singer Ray King, in his band Pharaoh's Kingdom."

"I first met Jerry when I was playing in soul bands around Coventry," remembers Golding when *Long Live Vinyl* catches up with him separately. "I was born in Jamaica and exposed to all the early roots-reggae. My father was from the generation who came to England on the Windrush, and settled in Gloucester where he found a job in manufacturing. After he was laid off, he followed the work to Coventry and its thriving motor industry.

"One day, Jerry asked me round to his house to discuss a few ideas that he had. I was really into soul and reggae, but it was the time of punk and its anyone-can-play attitude – I think we were a more advanced group of musicians."

"I was a bit frustrated with what was going on in Cov at the time," continues Jerry. "I wanted to be part of something original, so I decided to form a punk-reggae band. I was inspired as much by what wasn't happening in Coventry, as by what was.



Coventry in the 70s: a black and white city

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"I first recruited Horace, drummer Silverton Hutchinson, Neol on guitar and Tim Strickland on vocals. I wanted an authentic reggae element, so I brought in Lynval with his trebly Fender Telecaster and he replaced Neol. After our first couple of gigs, Lynval left because he didn't want anything to do with punk. I had to beg him to come back. Tim was more of a speaker than a singer, so I persuaded Terry in from Squad and Roddy Radiation to leave his own band [The Wild Boys], to make it punkier, plus Roddy had some good songs.

"The contrast between punk and reggae was so extreme it didn't really work, but I heard a record by Capital Letters who, unusually for roots-reggae, had the old ska rhythm. Eureka! I realised the two styles could be blended much more successfully over that energetic old rhythm."

Music journalist and curator of the Coventry Music Museum, Pete Chambers, recalls seeing an early incarnation of the band: "Did I think I was witnessing the future of Coventry music when I first came across The Coventry Automatics one Monday night at Mr George's? No, but the mixture of punk and ska they were playing was definitely something new and exciting."

IT'S UP TO YOU

Also impressed by The Coventry Automatics' enthralling fresh sound was The Clash's Joe Strummer. No stranger to cross-genre pollination having covered Junior Murvin's *Police And Thieves* on their eponymous debut, Strummer invited the band, now gigging as The Special AKA, on their On Parole tour. "We managed to blag our way into one gig supporting The Clash because we knew their roadie Roadent," recalls Jerry. "The Clash liked us, so we got the whole tour. Neville Staple, who was one of our roadies, jumped on stage and added a lot of energy with his dancing and toasting interjections."

Staple, like Golding, was born in Jamaica and moved to Rugby as a child. Staple says: "When I was a teenager my cousin, who was a local

"I WAS FRUSTRATED WITH WHAT WAS GOING ON IN COV AT THE TIME. I WAS INSPIRED AS MUCH BY WHAT WASN'T HAPPENING IN COVENTRY, AS BY WHAT WAS"

Jerry Dammers

The Specials fused ska and rocksteady with punk's energy and attitude

ENJOY YOURSELF

What is your favourite 2 Tone track?

Jerry Dammers *"Ghost Town* is my favourite Specials song, but I also love *Mirror In The Bathroom* by The Beat. To get a song about the mental illness of narcissism into the Top 10 was an amazing achievement."

Lynval Golding *"Nite Klub* really has the feel of a Saturday night. I have very fond memories of going out in Coventry, of Mr George's, Hand & Heart, Hope & Anchor, The Alhambra… oh yes, and the beer! [laughs]"

Pauline Black "Even if it is one of ours, *Celebrate The Bullet* remains prevalent. Look at the Black Lives Matter movement. It's a sophisticated song and an absolute joy to play live."

Neville Staple *"A Message To You Rudy* has a message to the youth which is still relevant today: 'Time you straighten right out… Better think of your future…'"

Ranking Roger *"Ghost Town* did it for me. It summed up everything so succinctly. It got to No.1 just when all those inner-city riots were taking place and proved the perfect soundtrack to what was going on politically."

Pete Chambers "I adore The Specials, but for me The Selecter were the ultimate 2 Tone band. That fantastic guitar lick from Neol Davies on *Celebrate The Bullet* and those acerbic lyrics, I thought it was amazing. Pauline Black is the ultimate frontperson."

DJ, introduced me to the likes of The Skatalites, Desmond Dekker, Lee 'Scratch' Perry… When I moved to Coventry I followed in his footsteps, touring the nightclubs with my Jah Baddis Sound System, toasting over reggae records. I practised at the Holyhead community centre and can remember hearing this punky ska sound from the room next door. The mix of sounds drew me in, and I asked if I could hang out. I remember toasting along during soundcheck on that Clash tour and Jerry invited me on stage… and that's where I stayed."

BERNIE RHODES KNOWS DON'T ARGUE!

Following The Clash tour, Silverton quit the band and Dammers approached John 'Brad' Bradbury. Dammers recalls: "Silverton left because he didn't like my idea of going back to 60s ska, which he saw as a retrograde step, so I brought in Brad who was the only other drummer I knew in Cov who could play reggae, plus I shared a house with him. It was hard to persuade Lynval to ditch the flares and wide lapels and wear second-hand tonic suits, but he got into it eventually.

"I started The Specials as a vehicle for my songs and I wrote about half of all the material, covers made up some of the other half, but I did all I could to encourage everyone to contribute songs. There was always a bit of an overall concept, but part of that concept was to be flexible and to change with an eye on what was happening. Rock Against Racism was an influence on our specifically anti-racist stance and gave birth to songs like *Doesn't Make It Alright*.

"I'm always grateful that Coventry seems so proud of The Specials nowadays, because some of our lyrics didn't entirely paint a rosy picture."

The Special AKA entered the studio to record their debut single *Gangsters*. Although originally written by Dammers on Strummer's guitar in the dressing room on the Clash tour, Jerry later added a musical quotation from the 1964 track *Al Capone* by Prince Buster. He swapped 'Al Capone's Guns Don't Argue' to 'Bernie Rhodes Knows Don't Argue', a jibe towards The Clash's manager, who had attempted to take the band under his wing. *Gangsters* was a bombastic statement of intent. However, there was one problem... "Nobody wanted to sign us," says Golding. "So Jerry formed 2 Tone Records to release it."

With all his money invested in 2 Tone and the recording of *Gangsters*, Dammers approached his old friend Neol for help.

Pauline Black, vocalist of The Selecter, explained: "Jerry wanted to release *Gangsters* but had ran out of

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Three boys having fun: Neville Staple, Terry Hall and Lynval Golding

Getty

money to record a B-side, so he asked Neol if he had anything. Neol had this instrumental track called *The Selecter*, with Brad and a trombonist called Barry… the result was the *Gangsters vs. The Selecter* single."

ON MY RADIO

Black, who lived with adopted parents in Romford, says: "My earliest musical memories involved listening to old Tamla Motown records. I went to a school where there were a lot of Dagenham skinheads. They'd take over the common room and play Prince Buster, The Skatalites, Toots & The Maytals, Desmond Dekker, Millie Small, and that is where I first heard *Long Shot Kick De Bucket* by The Pioneers. So, my introduction to ska came via Dagenham skinheads.

"I left Essex to study Combined Science at the Lanchester Polytechnic and I would see Horace and Jerry hanging around the arts faculty. John Peel started giving *Gangsters* regular airplay. After the success of that single everyone said Neol should form a band. I was singing in local pubs when Lynval introduced me."

Dammers adds: "I was really pleased Neol formed The Selecter, because I felt a bit bad about having replaced him."

The mounting curiosity that surrounded *Gangsters vs. The Selecter* was shared by A&R departments at record labels. As the single climbed the charts, peaking at No.6, Dammers received several offers. However, he held out for a deal that would allow 2 Tone to keep its identity.

Dammers says: "When we signed the label to Chrysalis, we retained artistic control. I just wanted to give like-minded bands a break and thought if we worked together instead of competing, we could build a ska movement up to support each other. Chrysalis was the only company who agreed to let us have the facility to release other bands through 2 Tone, that was one of the main reasons we signed with them." Staple continues: "2 Tone could've happened anywhere, but it took Jerry's insight. It was all his vision."

(DAWNING OF A) NEW ERA

With a deal struck, it was time for Dammers and his band to hit the studio. "I suppose I was trying to put a bit of my socialist worldview onto it all," says Dammers. "For the first album, we just went in and laid down what we had developed in our live set, but with Jamaica's legendary trombonist Rico Rodriguez adding some real blues and ska authenticity. The importance of his contribution to The Specials can't be overstated, I regard him as the real heart and soul and best musician in the band. We were so privileged to have him amongst us. He and Dandy Livingstone brought live ska and reggae to Britain in the first place."

"Elvis Costello had heard *Gangsters* on the John Peel show and wanted to produce our first album," adds Golding. "So, we went into the studio to record it with him. We just planned to have a good time with a few beers and bottles of wine."

"I'M ALWAYS GRATEFUL THAT COVENTRY SEEMS SO PROUD OF THE SPECIALS NOWADAYS, AS SOME OF OUR LYRICS DIDN'T ENTIRELY PAINT A ROSY PICTURE"
Jerry Dammers

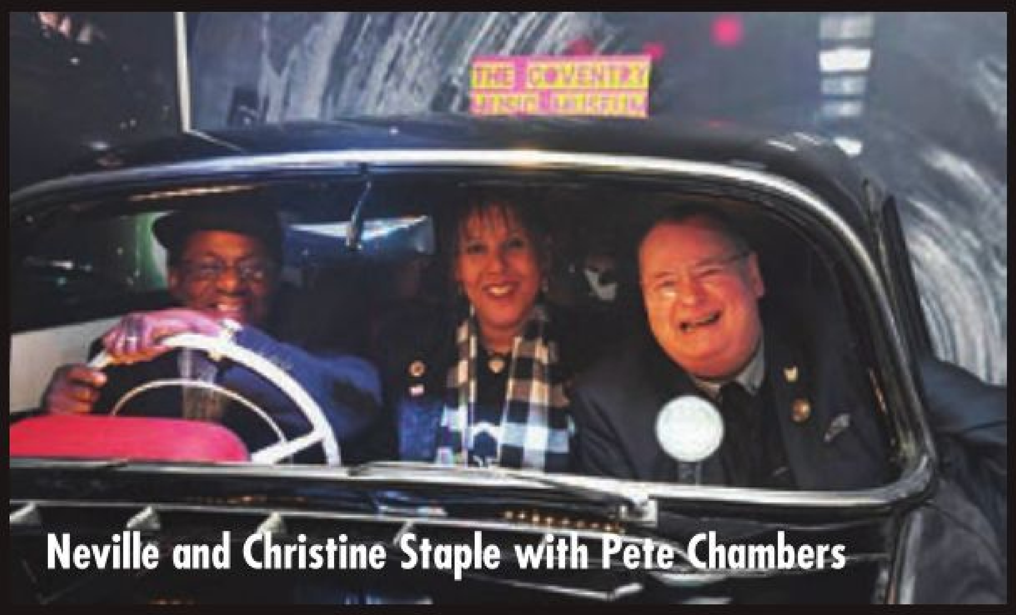
Pauline Black and Desmond Brown of The Selecter captured live in 1979

However, outside the studio a 2 Tone movement was growing. "I remember a buzz quickly developing," says Pete Chambers. "But it needed Jerry and his energy to galvanise it. Coventry was very much like Detroit, in that it was a multicultural city and home to the motor industry. There was an undeniable sense of civic pride that here was a credible band putting the city on the music map."

Dammers says: "Coventry had the heart bombed out of it in the war and was a city in decline at the end of the 70s after the car industry boom had initially brought high wages. But 2 Tone didn't just happen in Coventry, Madness had independently come up with a similar idea of playing ska in London before they ever saw The Specials. I'd first seen Ranking Roger

DO YOU REMEMBER THE GOOD OLD DAYS?

Celebrate 40 years of 2 Tone at the Coventry Music Museum


John Coles

Neville and Christine Staple with Pete Chambers

"This is going to be a big year for us," says the Coventry Music Museum's curator Pete Chambers. "We have a lot of special events lined up to mark the 40th anniversary of 2 Tone. We celebrate everything that has come out of Coventry, but 2 Tone is obviously the biggest.

"Jerry Dammers has kindly loaned us the actual Yamaha organ that he wrote the No.1 chart-topper *Ghost Town* on, and that is on display alongside the *Ghost Town* car from the iconic video.

The 1962 Vauxhall Cresta is proving to be a very popular attraction and people enjoy sitting in it.

"But what we have here is not just the museum. We're located in the middle of the 2 Tone Village and there's a real sense of community about what we have, it's a place of celebration. We get visitors from all over the world and every continent, that's how far the message of 2 Tone spread.

"The very fact we're still talking about 2 Tone 40 years on is its legacy. It wasn't just a piece of great pop music, it was a whole movement that had integrity. That 2 Tone came from the city of Peace & Reconciliation should not go unnoticed. Coventry continues to reinvent itself. It's a resilient place with a spirit that will always beat with the same heart."

For more info **www.covmm.co.uk**

Coventry's Walk of Fame

Amanda Slater. www.flickr.com

toasting punk lyrics over reggae rhythms in Birmingham, so the punk-reggae fusion was already in his mind. The band he toasted with became The Beat."

"It was a strange time in Birmingham," says Roger. "Everyone was in a band or wanted to be in a band. It was a time of high unemployment and music offered a way out."

JUST CAN'T STOP IT

Born in Birmingham, Roger's early influences included Dillinger, Big Youth and Lee Perry, but then came the Sex Pistols. "They were totally different to everything else," he says. "Demonised by the press, they really had something to say. Around the same time, Steel Pulse had developed momentum with their debut album *Handsworth Revolution*, it made us realise we stood a chance."

The origins of The Beat began on the Isle Of Wight, where Dave Wakeling and Andy Cox met while building solar panels. They decided to form a band and, on moving back to Birmingham, recruited the rhythm section of David Steele and Everett Morton. Roger recalls: "I was playing drums in a punk band called The Dum Dum Boys and The Beat blew us off stage when they supported us. There was something special about The Beat. I'd always join in with them and Dave eventually asked me to become a permanent member.

"The Beat happened to be in the right place at the right time. Jerry saw us and asked if we'd like to put out a record and tour with The Selecter. It was phenomenal, I was fresh out of school and within months I was on *Top Of The Pops* performing *Tears Of A Clown*."

REVOLUTION ROCK

Prior to The Beat landing their prized spot on *TOTP*, The Selecter, The Specials and Madness appeared on one notable episode of the show, while the 2 Tone Tour, featuring all three bands, was in full effect. The Specials' eponymous debut album, released in October 1979, had shot straight into the UK album charts at No.4. 2 Tone had arrived.

"I think we realised something big was happening when we set out on that first 2 Tone tour," says Lynval. "It was then I realised just how much we were bringing people together."

"There was a real camaraderie between the three bands delivering the same unified message," agrees Black. "But it was the fans that turned it into a movement."

"Those early shows were complete chaos," adds Staple. "It was music that the kids could dance to and the word spread quickly that we were actually really good."

"Well, we didn't realise it at first," says Dammers, "but reggae and ska are a kind of ecstatic music, based in African traditions, and it's impossible to describe the energy that comes from playing that music. The whole of the band is much greater than the sum of the parts, and everyone is supporting

Getty

Birmingham's The Beat released their first single on 2 Tone

each other rhythmically, it's a feeling of unity which spreads to the audience, it's an incredible feeling. There were times when I felt like I was floating above the ground. Those dancehalls were literally shaking, it was very exciting seeing it all come together and take off, those were the best times, so good that it's all a bit of a blur now."

"There was nothing like our early shows," offers Roger. "We attracted some of the disenchanted punks and those shows were an opportunity for them to let off steam."

Pete Chambers agrees: "I adored punk, but always thought it had a big mouth and not a lot to say… 2 Tone had a big mouth and everything to say. With its black and white imagery and political stance, the music made you think."

"Punk was very much embedded into the foundations of what we were doing," adds Black. "The forward-thinking kids in the white community mixed with forward-thinking kids in the black community to create a hybrid happening. Youngsters were looking for something new, and visually 2 Tone fit the bill with the Walt Jabsco black suit, white shirt, black tie, pork pie hat, white socks and black loafers."

Chrissie Hynde, Debbie Harry, Viv Albertine, Siouxsie Sioux, Poly Styrene and Pauline Black of The Selecter assemble for an *NME* cover shoot in 1980

TOO MUCH PRESSURE

Punk nihilistically predicted no future, but 2 Tone asked what we could do about it, addressing racism, sexism and class division. "There was a lot of disillusioned people that didn't understand different cultures," says Roger. "Our music was a melting pot designed to unite. We spoke about world politics, people politics, personal politics."

"You can deliver a message of unity, but you can't make people listen," admits Black. "With 2 Tone you had black and white on stage together. I was a woman and I was black. It was difficult for the likes of Poly Styrene [lead singer of X-Ray Spex] and me to be heard. We weren't selling what a lot of women of the day were selling, namely sex. There were some wonderful women forging their own path and there is the famous *NME* photograph of Debbie Harry, Viv Albertine, Siouxsie Sioux, Chrissie Hynde, Poly and myself, which captures perfectly that moment in time. There was widespread dissatisfaction and it was a time of *Too Much Pressure*. Industries were closing and cities were becoming ghost towns."

Dammers adds: "The events in my songs didn't all happen in Coventry, Glasgow was the initial inspiration for *Ghost Town* [released June 1981], but it's irrelevant really, I wanted my songs to be as universal as possible, with a sort of 'Anywhere, Anystreet, Anytown' address on them."

"People think that *Ghost Town* was about Coventry," confirms Golding. "But it was about all the cities we visited. Nearly 40 years on and Britain is in political turmoil again with widespread division. Coventry is still multi-racial, but it's lost its industry and its roots. Local kids, who might not have the same opportunities, are lost. But it's not just Coventry, it's across the country."

"I ADORED PUNK, BUT ALWAYS THOUGHT IT HAD A BIG MOUTH AND NOT A LOT TO SAY… 2 TONE, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAD A BIG MOUTH AND EVERYTHING TO SAY"
Pete Chambers

WHY MUST THE YOUTH FIGHT THEMSELVES?

Forty years since Jerry Dammers and 2 Tone vocalised social consternation, we again find ourselves in troubled times. Coventry is one of the most violent places in Europe and, like many cities in Britain, suffers from prevalent knife crime.

MORE SPECIALS…

Four decades on and The Specials remain relevant

Nearly 40 years on since *Ghost Town* topped the UK singles chart, The Specials 2019 beat Busted and toppled *The Greatest Showman* to claim the No.1 spot in the UK album chart with *Encore*. Lynval says: "Britain is in a right mess [sings]: 'If we vote for you, do you promise; to be upright, decent and honest; to have our best interest at heart'.

"We hadn't intended for *Vote For Me* to be the first radio track, but the record company loved it. That is a song I first demoed with Brad. Horace and Brad were so solid as a rhythm section and never dropped a beat, but sadly Brad died in 2015 and he was the main driving force behind us regrouping. We had planned a new record and I always like to think his spirit features heavy on this album.

"I am so proud of this new album and I'm particularly thrilled with the track *Embarrassed By You*. Many years ago, back when I was a pop star, I met this talented young student during a school visit to Ernesford Grange in Coventry. His name was Mark Adams and, even at a really young age, I could see he had talent and I wanted to help nurture it.

"So, I put my money where my mouth was and took him under my wing… 37 years on, we co-wrote this song together and I couldn't be more pleased."

The chart-topping trio

"I think it's a bit dangerous to say that we're facing the same problems," says Dammers. "We have to adapt our response to the times. In those days, mass unemployment was the main problem, now it's low wages, poverty, zero-hours contracts, run-down social services, bureaucratic and sometimes inadequate welfare benefits, and a crisis in health care, especially mental health and for old people.

"Once again, immigrants have been wrongly getting the blame, in fact, immigration has been boosting our economy, servicing the NHS. One of the many real problems is the government's failure to build social housing, which would also boost the economy." Tragically, Staple's grandson recently being stabbed to death shows that whatever causes it, the violence and the gangs have not gone away.

"What's going on today is really frightening," admits Staple. "Kids take knives out with them for protection and Fidel got caught up in it all and lost his life. The glamourising of gangs in American rap culture has filtered down to trapped British youths and there's no way out for them. Not every kid is going to go into further education and, when they can't reach that required level, they are marginalised or they're seen as underachievers."

"Austerity is driving deprivation and it is not being addressed by politicians," adds Black. "Society needs to look at why young people are turning on each other. You can't hope for change, religion peddles hope and look where that has got us. People need to be proactive if things are to change."

ALL OUT TO GET YOU

On his new album *Public Confidential* (DMF Records), Roger reflects how 2019 life echoes that of 1979: "We need people to take control as a society. If something is wrong, you need to act and fix it. This is an album influenced, however indirectly, by Brexit, the Windrush scandal, Grenfell Tower, the Manchester terrorist attack. It's political in its own way."

Similarly, Golding has reconvened with Terry Hall and Horace Panter for *Encore* (Island/UMC), the stunning new Specials album that landed universal critical acclaim and reflects on the band's opinions on 2019. Minus Jerry, Neville, Roddy and Brad, who died in 2015, the album topped the UK chart in February.

Golding says: "I was brought up with racism and was stabbed in Coventry. I can see how the city has changed and how the eastern European families that moved here are now subjected to the same racial abuse as the black West Indian population did.

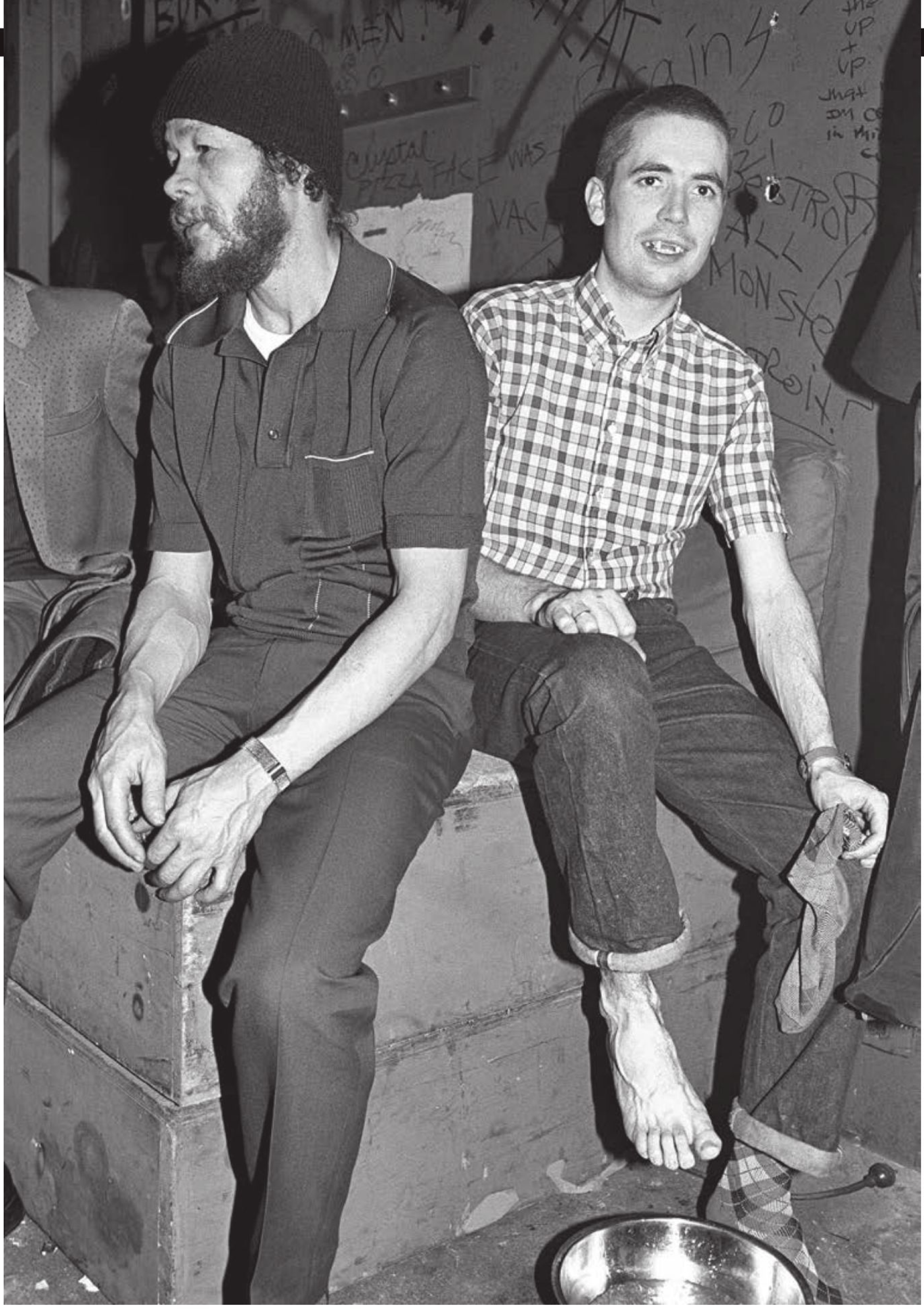
"On the new track *B.L.M.*, I address the racism that my father experienced when he moved to the UK. All lives matter and he came here to help rebuild the country, but the Government has treated his generation very badly. The song also reflects on the kind of abuse I suffered, being called 'black bastard' and a 'goddam nigger'."

A MESSAGE TO YOU

2 Tone's message of solidarity continues to be heard as incarnations of The Specials, The Beat and The Selecter appear on stages all over the world.

Getty

The Specials' classic line-up (L-R): Roddy Radiation, Sir Horace Gentleman, Terry Hall, Neville Staple, Lynval Golding, John Bradbury and Jerry Dammers



Getty

"It's incredible," admits Golding. "All these youngsters singing along to *Too Much Too Young*, those kids weren't even born when it was written. It shows there's a longevity to what was created, they get it, there's no gimmick and it was great music. I have to pinch myself because it's absolutely wonderful to be in my 60s and still be talking about The Specials and making new music."

Staple concurs: "The young crowds who come to my Neville Staple Band gigs know how to have a good time and there's a really friendly vibe… it's just like those early shows."

"Yes, we have the old-school fans and we're very grateful for their continued support," says Black, "but it is heartening to see and speak to so many young people at our shows who have discovered The Selecter and like how politically adventurous we are. 2 Tone, like many great movements, burned brightly for a short time, but made a lasting impression. I look back with immense pride, at a young age we created music that meant something to so many people."

"2 TONE, LIKE MANY GREAT MOVEMENTS, BURNED BRIGHTLY FOR A SHORT TIME, BUT MADE A LASTING IMPRESSION"

Pauline Black

Trombonist Rico Rodriguez turns away as Jerry Dammers soaks his feet backstage at Hurrah's in New York on January 25, 1980

"Our music still moves and appeals to all ages," agrees Roger. "2 Tone helped change a generation willing to open their minds and every generation has a shining light: a Bob Marley or John Lennon… we had Jerry Dammers."

IT'S LATER THAN YOU THINK

So, what is the legacy of 2 Tone for Dammers and how does he feel now that the dust has settled and he can look back?

"Thankfully, there are some great recordings and I'm proud of most of them. They really do seem to have stood the test of time. Hopefully we achieved something important in the fight against racism, working alongside other people like Rock Against Racism, The Anti-Nazi League and the Anti-Apartheid movement.

"Looking back on it, I still think it was very sad and unnecessary for The Fun Boy Three [Lynval, Terry and Neville] to leave The Specials when they did, but at least 2 Tone was able to carry on and create *Free Nelson Mandela*.

"While I think *Ghost Town* is better musically, *Free Nelson Mandela* had a lot more effect than any other 2 Tone song, and it also led to me being asked to organise Artists Against Apartheid, which included putting together a concert with a quarter of a million people protesting apartheid on Clapham Common. That led to the two Wembley Stadium Mandela Concerts broadcast to millions around the world.

"I hope to have something out soon, but it is a bit hard for me personally to celebrate the 40th anniversary when it feels like The Specials has been kidnapped and is not really being treated in the way that I would have liked. However, I will celebrate the good times." ●

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THE ESSENTIAL

SKA 45s

Jamaica's revolutionary back-to-front beat developed as a fresh and frantic take on US R&B and has been filling dancefloors with sweaty herberts ever since. **Gary Tipp** is in the mood for ska

In the early 1950s, Jamaicans were busy listening in to American music via radio stations in New Orleans and Miami, in particular, the R&B and jump blues of artists such as Fats Domino and Louis Jordan. Inspired by these sounds, Jamaican producers started to record versions of those records by local artists.

While still in the ballpark of R&B, these recordings also incorporated influences from traditional styles such as mento, also known as Jamaican folk music, and calypso, an Afro-Caribbean style. This fresh take on American music gradually developed into a new uniquely Jamaican genre, namely ska.

Its distinctive sound incorporated a scratchy guitar chop that stressed the off-beat, rhythmically propelling the music forward in unison with the horns; all the while, a walking bassline and on-tempo drums were holding things together. Ska pioneer Ernest Ranglin, who lays claim to inventing the guitar chop, was famously quoted as saying that the point of difference between R&B and ska beats is that the former goes 'chink-ka', while the latter goes 'ka-chink'.

By the early 1960s, ska was the most popular musical genre in Jamaica, and 45s were being released rapidly by the owners of the mobile sound systems to blast at revellers at the multitude of street parties held on the island. Two such owners, Clement 'Coxsone' Dodd and Duke Reid, along with producer Leslie Kong, were hugely important in ska's development, forming their own labels and acting as producers for local artists.

The Skatalites, led by trombonist Don Drummond, and featuring an all-star cast of musicians, including Roland Alphonso, Tommy McCook and Jackie Mitoo, were the top instrumental group, and also served as the Studio 1 session band.

KA-CHINK, KA-CHINK

The first wave of ska superstar vocalists included Laurel Aitken, Derrick Morgan, Desmond Dekker and Toots Hibbert. Ska's popularity was not confined to Jamaica and the music crossed over into the mainstream charts in both the UK and US in the mid-60s. Blazing a trail was Millie Small with *My Boy Lollipop*, which was a huge hit on both sides of the Atlantic.

Ska was eventually superseded by rocksteady, its more soulful, less frantic close relation, and several of the 45s we have chosen here fall into the transition period between the two genres when lines were blurred. Ska enjoyed a spectacular renaissance in the UK during the late 70s and early 80s thanks both to punk's affinity with the music of Jamaica and the rise of 2 Tone bands, such as The Specials, Madness and The Selecter. A third wave saw a rock-orientated, un-Jamaican version of ska become popular in the US during the 90s, with bands like The Mighty Mighty Bosstones, Fishbone and The Toasters.

Our Essential collection sensibly avoids the minefield that is Jamaican pressings and concentrates on UK releases.

20 LORD TANAMO

IN THE MOOD FOR SKA (1965)

Written by prolific tunesmith Jimmy McHugh way back in 1935, everyone from Vera Lynn to Cliff Richard has recorded a version of this romantic standard, but nobody committed a version to vinyl quite like Lord Tanamo. The ska legend cut his teeth on calypso and mento before joining the mighty Skatalites. An advert for Paxo, of all things, enabled the 45 to chart in the UK in 1990.

£ *Rarest* 1965 Ska Beat **£150**

19 FISHBONE

MA AND PA (1989)

LA residents Fishbone were one of the major players associated with the US ska scene of the mid 80s. The band's hyperactive live shows established a strong following and an early break saw them touring as support to the Beastie Boys, but mainstream success was never forthcoming. The maniacal *Ma And Pa* scraped the outer reaches of the charts in the UK in 1989.

£ *Rarest* Epic **£5**

18 ANDY & JOEY

YOU'RE WONDERING NOW (1964)

Andy & Joey were, in fact, Reuben Anderson and his vocal partner, Joanne Dennis. This gloriously lo-fi early ska staple is based around a simple, sweet melody and was released in the UK in 1964 on the R&B label. It didn't come remotely close to charting but made a lasting impact on The Specials, who recorded it as the closing track on their classic debut album.

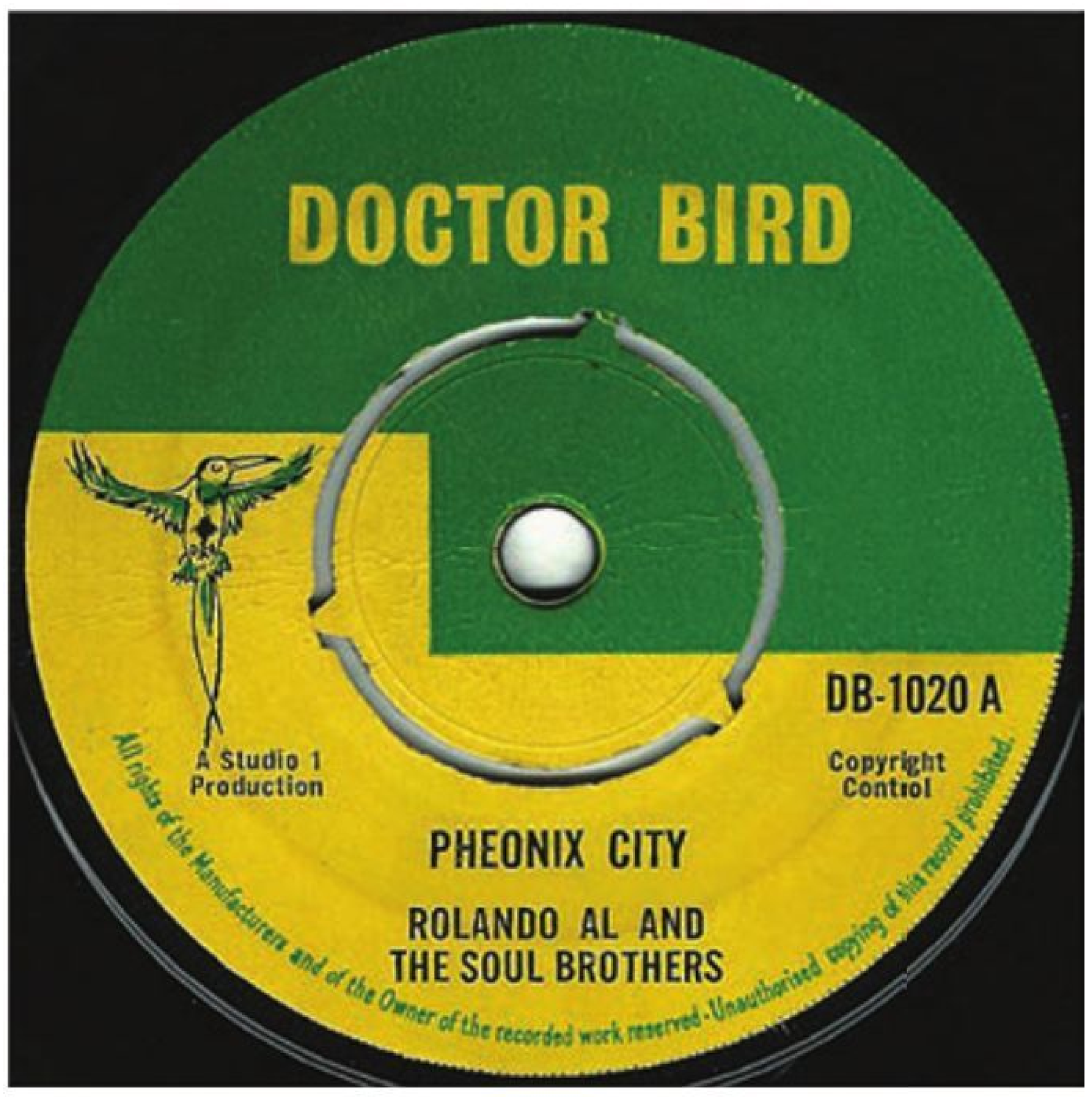
Rarest 1964 R&B **£40**

16 MADNESS

THE PRINCE (1979)

After changing their name from The North London Invaders to Madness, it was only proper the band's first single should be in acknowledgement of their major influence and whose song title they had duly reappropriated. The affectionate Prince Buster tribute was the second single released on 2 Tone and began the Nutty Boys' long-lasting love affair with the UK singles chart.

Rarest 1979 2 Tone **£40 (paper label)**



17 ROLAND ALPHONSO

PHEONIX CITY (1966)

Roland Alphonso was one of the founding members of Studio 1's house band The Skatalites and was happy to answer to the flattering nickname of The Chief Musician. The Cuban-born tenor saxophonist recorded this scorching jazzy-ska tribute to the sun-baked Arizona state capital as Rolando Al And The Soul Brothers. It was released in the UK on the Doctor Bird label.

Rarest 1966 Doctor Bird **£35**

15 PRINCE BUSTER & THE ALL STARS

AL CAPONE/ONE STEP BEYOND (1965)

Prince Buster may have been christened Cecil Bustamente Campbell, but he was crowned the King of Ska. His recorded output in the 60s on the Blue Beat label is without peer and his hits comp *Fabulous* is an essential purchase on vinyl. Classic 45 *Al Capone* played out the Jamaican music scene's fascination with Hollywood gangster movies. It was recorded in 1964 and released in the UK a year later with *One Step Beyond* on the flip. The youth of Coventry and Camden were listening.

Rarest 1965 Blue Beat **£20 (green label)**

18+

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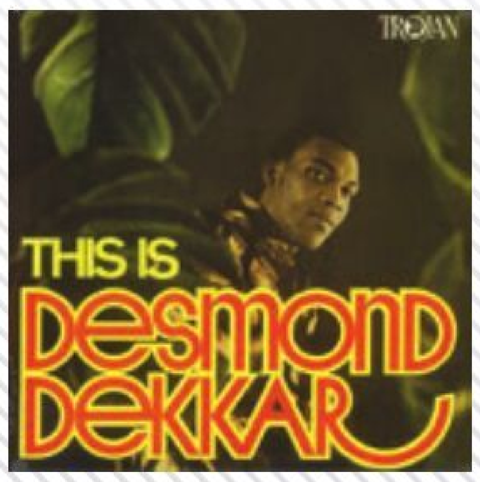
Five steps beyond

THE SKATALITES
Ska Authentic
Studio 1 (£25)
A collection of the legendary band's early Studio 1 recordings, including Tommy McCook's iconic *Freedom Sounds* has recently been reissued.

Prince Buster
I Feel The Spirit
Bad Joker (£15)
Renowned as the first ska album ever to be released in the UK, this is an excellent introduction into Prince Buster's early recordings.

Desmond Dekker
This Is Desmond Dekkar
Trojan (£20)
Rush released to a waiting UK audience, Dekker's first album was a singles compilation and includes a ludicrous titular typo on the sleeve.



Don Drummond
Memorial Album
Music On Vinyl (£20)
Trombonist Don Drummond was an original member of The Skatalites, who died in prison after the murder of his girlfriend.

Ethiopians
Engine 54
Music On Vinyl (£20)
The *Train To Skaville* hitmakers clearly had a thing for locomotives, as this recent reissue of their thrilling debut album bears witness.

14

THE SELECTER
ON MY RADIO (1979)

The Selecter followed up the appearance on the flipside of The Specials' *Gangsters* single with a smash of their own making. The band were wary that its indecent catchiness and lack of hard edge made it sound like a Eurovision entry, but its rapid climb into the Top Ten softened the blow. It may have been 'the same old show on my radio' but the DJs lapped it up.

£ *Rarest* 1979 2 Tone **£12 (paper label)**

13

DERRICK MORGAN
MOON HOP (1969)

While Morgan may have fallen out big time with his feuding rival Lee Perry, the UK skinhead fraternity were always full of adoration for the Godfather Of Ska. *Moon Hop*, written to celebrate the Apollo moon landing, was released on the Crab label in 1969 and quickly adopted as an anthem by the boots and braces brethren. It was covered by Symarip and rebadged as *Skinhead Moonstomp*.

£ *Rarest* 1969 Crab **£40**

12

MILLIE
MY BOY LOLLIPOP (1964)

My Boy Lollipop was the first ska single to break through into the mainstream, reaching number two in both the UK and the US in 1964. A culturally important 45, it not only injected a much-needed slice of something refreshingly different to the charts on both sides of the pond, but its success gave Island Records' founder Chris Blackwell the financial platform to launch his label. Urban legend wrongly has it that Rod Stewart is responsible for the harmonica solo.

£ *Rarest* 1964 Fontana **£7**

10

THE UPSETTERS
RETURN OF DJANGO (1969)

Lee 'Scratch' Perry's studio band were originally known as Gladdy's All Stars, led as they were by pianist Gladstone Anderson. A change of name to The Upsetters, as well as the Perry connection, brought a number five hit on the UK singles chart. It was an AA-side release coupled with spaghetti western companion piece *Dollar In The Teeth*.

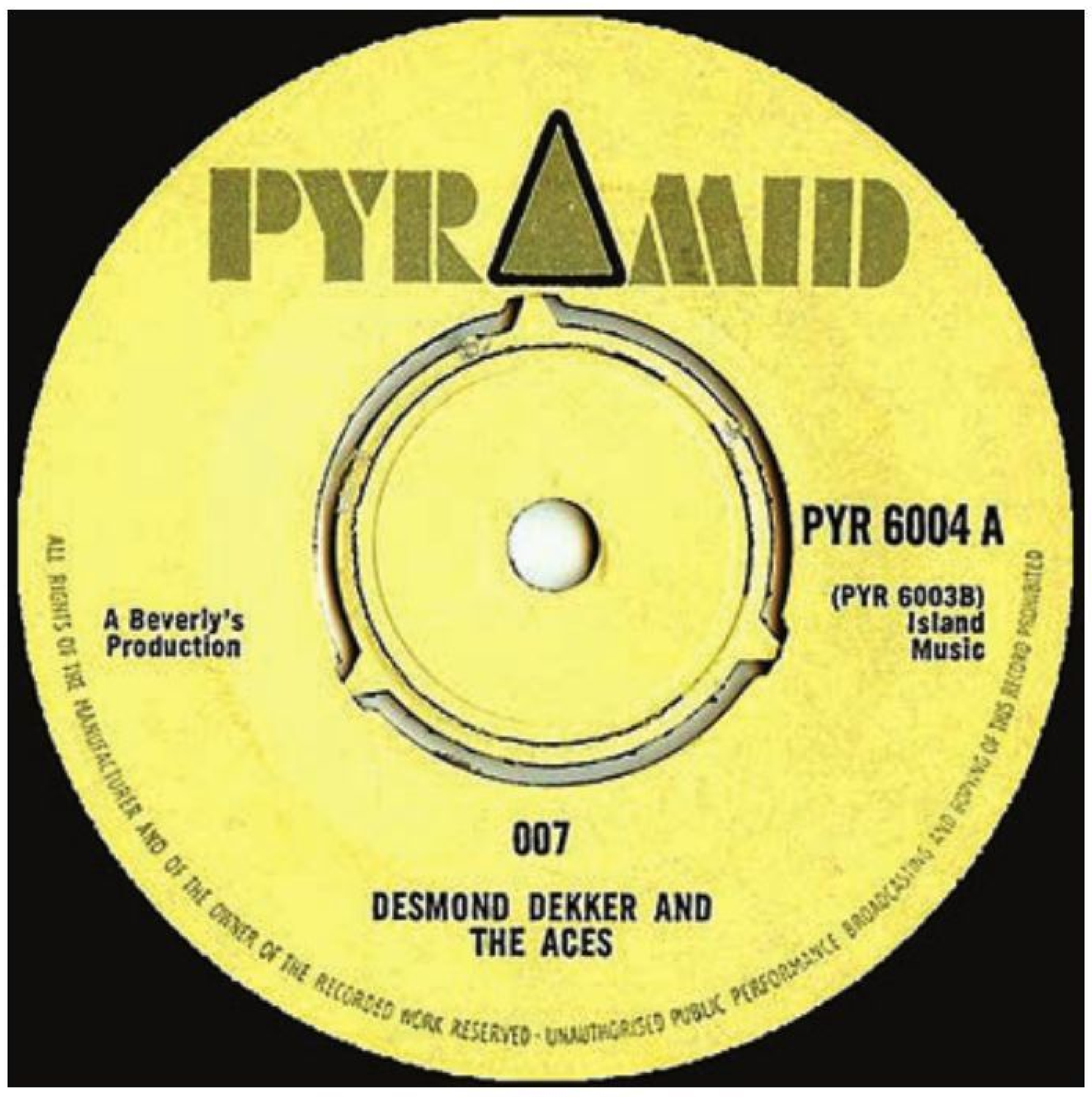
£ *Rarest* 1969 Upsetter **£15**

11

THE WAILERS
SIMMER DOWN (1965)

Before becoming roots rock reggae's global godhead Bob Marley was part of a vocal trio, with ska 45s their stock in trade. Accompanied by the legendary Skatalites and produced by the similarly iconic Coxsone Dodd, *Simmer Down* saw them sending a syncopated message to the rude boys of Kingston to cool it with the gun crime.

£ *Rarest* 1965 Ska Beat **£70**



9

007 (SHANTY TOWN)
DESMOND DEKKER AND THE ACES (1967)

The narrative thread of Dekker's landmark 45 was a cautionary tale against the perils of the rude boy lifestyle, but the song was so impossibly cool that the Jamaican street gangs adopted it as their own. Another tribe held in its thrall were the mods, who helped it reach no.17 in the UK charts in 1967. A year later, Dekker bettered that with the chart-topping *Israelites*.

£ *Rarest* 1967 Pyramid **£12**

8 ETHIOPIANS

TRAIN TO SKAVILLE (1967)

Ethiopians bridged the gap between ska and its more melodic close relation rocksteady with a string of hits. The locomotive-loving instrumental *Last Train To Skaville* was the group's breakthrough smash, but only came about when band leader Leonard Dillon, who was working as a stone mason at the time, persuaded his boss to invest in a recording session.

£ *Rarest* 1967 Rio **£30**

7 THE SPECIAL AKA

GANGSTERS (1979)

This reworking of Prince Buster's ska classic *Al Capone* was the glorious opening salvo of the UK ska revival of the late 70s/early 80s. The song recounts an incident on tour in France with The Clash when the band's gear was taken hostage by a disgruntled hotel owner. The opening line "Bernie Rhodes knows don't argue" is a reference to the band's former manager.

£ *Rarest* 1979 2-Tone (stamped white sleeve, paper label) **£45**

6 THE MAYTALS

54-46 THAT'S MY NUMBER (1968)

The genre-defining classic *54-46 (That's My Number)* was recorded by The Maytals and released in the UK on the Pyramid label in 1968. It alludes to Toots Hibbert's 12-month incarceration in prison for possession of marijuana. Confusingly, a follow-up version was also released as a single by Trojan a couple of years later, changing the 'That's' to 'Was'. Both are essential.

£ *Rarest* 1968 Pyramid **£30**

5 THE PIONEERS

LONG SHOT KICK DE BUCKET (1969)

Vocal trio The Pioneers recorded two songs about the some fateful racehorse. The original *Long Shot (Bus Me Bet)* was written by Lee Perry and chronicled the struggles of the titular nag to win a race despite years of trying. The infinitely more successful follow-up told the story of its unfortunate death and cracked the UK charts in 1969 while doing so.

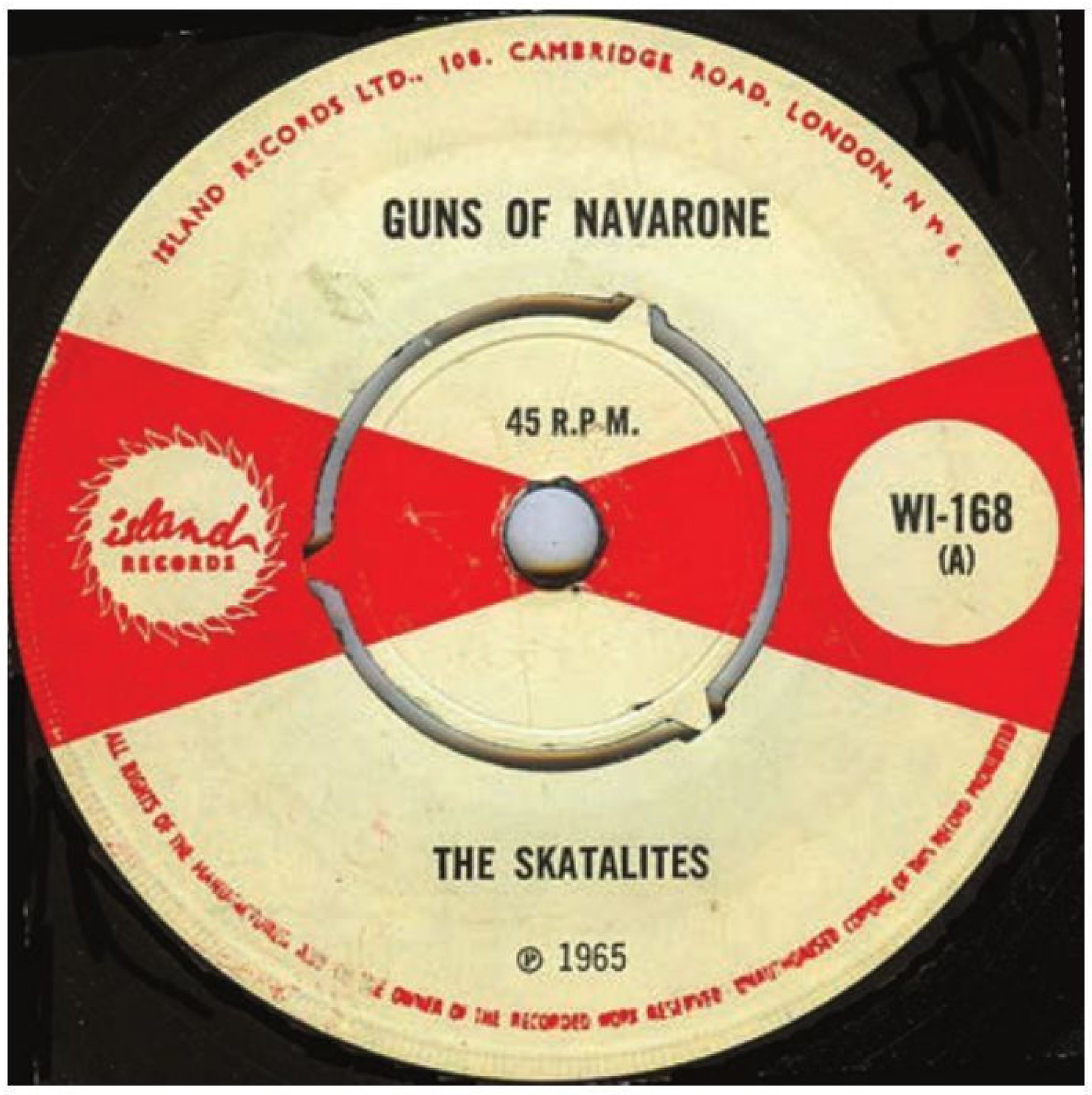
£ *Rarest* 1969 Trojan **£25**

4 THE SLICKERS

JOHNNY TOO BAD
(1971)

The Slickers operated on the cusp of the transition from ska to rocksteady. The inclusion of the band's legendary rude boy 45 on *The Harder They Come* soundtrack propelled them into the mainstream – something the band weren't quite ready for with a revolving door of members. The song's been covered by, naturally enough, UB40 and The Specials, with John Martyn and Steve Earle also having a bash.

Rarest 1971 Punch **£15**



2 THE SKATALITES

GUNS OF NAVARONE
(1965)

The 1961 epic war movie still remains a good way to waste a Sunday afternoon, but as a piece of cinema it has aged badly, unlike The Skatalites' inspired takeover of Dimitri Tiomkin's score, which still sounds as fresh as the proverbial small grassland plant. The 45 was originally released in the UK in 1965 on Island, but didn't appear in the charts until a couple of years later.

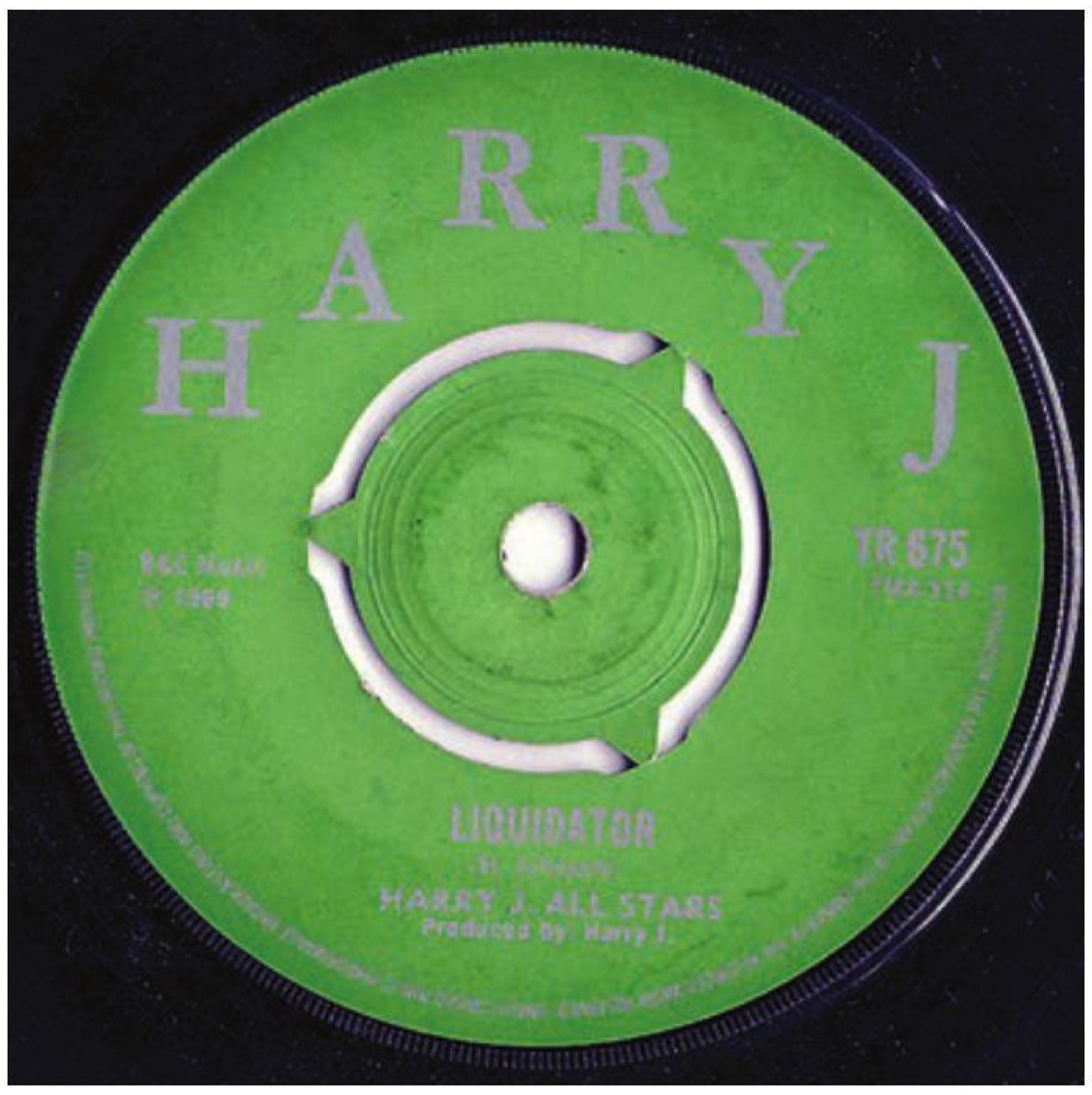
Rarest 1965 Island **£25/30**

3 DAVE AND ANSIL COLLINS

DOUBLE BARREL
(1970)

The most turning, storming sound of soul, *Double Barrel* was the second ska single to reach the top of the UK charts, beaten to the summit only by Desmond Dekker's *Israelites*. The pair weren't siblings, as the Dave in question was Dave Barker, a celebrated recording artist in his own right. The track combines his inspired, semi-crazed utterings ("I am the magnificent W-O-O-O") alongside Collins' infectious rinky-dink piano.

Rarest 1970 Techniques **£8**



1 HARRY J ALL-STARS

LIQUIDATOR
(1969)

The Harry J All-Stars were the in-house backing band of the legendary producer Harry Johnston. The mellow organ instrumental, keyboards courtesy of Winston Wright, was the soundtrack to many a terrace kicking and gained anthem status among skinhead gangs of the early 70s – it's still played pre-match at Stamford Bridge to this day. *Liquidator* reached number nine in the UK charts in October 1969.

Rarest 1969 Harry J **£10 (green label)**

POLITICS & DANCING

WHEN THE SPECIALS' STUNNING NEW ALBUM **ENCORE** DESERVEDLY ENTERED THE UK CHART AT NO.1 EARLIER THIS MONTH, IT CEMENTED ONE OF THE ALL-TIME GREAT COMEBACKS. THEY STILL HAVE A MESSAGE FOR YOU, RUDY – AND THEY'RE FINALLY UNITED IN HOW TO TELL IT. "**WE COULD HAVE BEEN AS MEGA AS U2**," THEY TELL CLASSIC POP. "**WHAT A CRAZY BAND WE WERE...**"

JOHN EARLS

If it wasn't quite Blur v Oasis for animosity, the recent battle of The Specials v Busted was certainly one of the most unlikely fights in pop history. Both bands had split at their height and faced years in the wilderness, though Terry Hall was less likely to form a splinter supergroup with McFly than the *Year 3000* mob did with McBusted.

Both seemingly getting on better than ever, they each released their comeback albums at the start of February. The Specials' magnificent *Encore* triumphed by 1,060 sales to beat Busted's *Half Way There*, giving the ska survivors their first No.1 album.

"Being at No.1? That's bonkers," laughs The Specials' bassist Horace Panter. "The word 'cynical' isn't a nice one to use. But when I first heard our album had made No.1, I thought, 'I'll believe it when I see it.' We did the best we possibly could with *Encore* and we're really proud of it. But the response has been an awful lot more positive than I ever expected."

It's a coincidence that *Encore* arrives exactly a decade after The Specials played their first comeback shows, which were 28 years after they'd split up in the *Top Of The Pops* dressing room waiting to perform *Ghost Town* in 1981.

Still, the timing highlights how, more than ever, one of the most important bands Britain has ever produced are also more in sync with each other than at any time in the five decades since they first formed as The Coventry Automatics in 1977.

GETTING ON THE GOOD FOOT

It may have taken a decade for The Specials to release 10 new songs, but *Encore* is the energetic opposite of a record borne out of any careful planning. There's no hint of cosiness in the album from three men in their sixties (well, nearly – Terry Hall, the baby of the group, hits 60 on 19 March). "We're a dance band," smiles singer/rhythm guitarist Lynval Golding. "How we approach our music is that we're a dance band with a message. Did then, do now." Horace agrees, saying: "I wouldn't be doing my job properly if people aren't dancing to our music. I'd be very upset if people aren't dancing to our album. It's what I still do in Coventry most weekends." The final word is left to relative newcomer Nikolaj Torp Larsen, the serene Danish keyboardist who has been a Special since 2009, when Jerry Dammers became the sole founding member to skip the reunion: "The Specials audiences are great. If it grooves then they dance. And if it doesn't groove, they start fighting. There's such adrenaline at Specials shows. If everyone is dancing, it's all good."

In the 38 years between *Ghost Town* and *Encore*, Horace had been a member of several Specials

The Specials, 2019. From left: Terry Hall, Horace Panter and Lynval Golding.

"THE SPECIALS AUDIENCES ARE GREAT. IF IT GROOVES THEN THEY DANCE. AND IF IT DOESN'T GROOVE, THEY START FIGHTING."

NIKOLAJ TORP LARSEN

THE SPECIALS &... PETE WATERMAN?

HOW THE STOCK, AITKEN & WATERMAN KINGPIN PRODUCED THE SPECIALS' FIRST DEMOS

Horace: "Pete had produced *Love Me Baby* for Susan Cadogan and was the only person we knew who had anything to do with the music business. He DJ'd at the Locarno in Coventry, where Neville knew him. Pete would come along to see us when we were The Coventry Automatics at Mr George's Club. We had a residency at 11pm on Monday nights, supporting local punk headliners. Pete heard something in us, so he took us to a studio in Berwick Street in Soho for a day."
Lynval: "Terry is the quickest singer going. After he recorded his vocals, Pete went, 'Fucking hell, where did you find this lad from? He's done it straight away! He's fucking unbelievable!'"
Horace: "Nothing came of the sessions, which was lucky as it was before we found our ska influence. We were a punk band with a bit of reggae."
Lynval: "Pete's version of *Too Much Too Young* is a lot different to what we know now, but he did a great job. I've got a lot of love and respect for him."
Horace: "The Specials gave pop an edgy sensibility, introducing politics and social issues. Then along comes some bloke from Coventry, who emasculates British pop music at a stroke. That was kind of weird. But I like Pete, he's a lovely bloke."

The reconvened Specials – relaxed recording sessions but a feisty end product

splinter groups. When Lynval, Terry and Neville Staple left to form Fun Boy Three, Horace stayed with Jerry and drummer John Bradbury in The Special AKA. Various other offshoots followed, with Horace sticking around for Special Beat and X Specials. He's in a better position than most to establish what it is about the core line-up of him, Lynval and Terry that makes *Encore* the work of the real Specials again. "I think it's that we're a lot more mature," he reasons. "Everyone in this project was facing the same way; there was no agenda. Nobody was out of their head, nobody was getting in anyone's face. It's like that sign said at the recording of *We Are The World*: 'Check your egos at the door'. That was one of the unsaid aspects of *Encore*, that everyone has the same purpose, and that's been transmitted into the music. The cynical realist in me thought, 'This could go wrong at any minute'. But it didn't, it's been brilliant."

That antagonism of The Specials' first incarnation Horace refers to peaked in the recording of second album *More Specials*. It meant Lynval was initially wary of going into the studio at a Mitcham industrial estate where *Encore* was recorded over four weeks last autumn. "The history of *More Specials* was that every day someone new would leave the band or threaten suicide," he says. "*More Specials* was always drama. This record? We were so relaxed! We never had a drop of alcohol in the sessions. That was amazing, as I'm from the old-school: 40 years of recording with a bottle of whisky, a bottle of gin, a six-pack of lager. *Encore*? No alcohol. It was so enjoyable!"

SPECIAL DELIVERY

It's essentially impossible not to add the occasional exclamation mark when quoting Lynval Golding. He and Nikolaj talk to *Classic Pop* at a small, anonymous meeting room at The Specials' record label Universal's HQ next to King's Cross station, where Horace speaks a week later. Lynval stays sat down throughout our hour together, but you can tell he's itching to keep moving, a giant green beaded necklace constantly bouncing as he speaks with the delighted enthusiasm of someone living out an unlikely second incarnation as what he calls "Mr Big Pop Star". A relative youngster at 45, Nikolaj is mostly content to let Lynval hold court – even when questions are addressed to him, Nikolaj soon deflects them back to his bandmate. Tall and slim, Nikolaj has the calm presence expected in someone who managed to get his three bandmates' disparate personalities flowing perfectly while producing *Encore*.

The Specials helped popularise the 'rude boy' look in the late 70s and early 80s

© Getty Images

The Specials in 1980. From left: Neville Staple, Jerry Dammers, Lynval Golding, Horace Panter, Terry Hall, John Bradbury and Roddy Radiation

Although *Encore* took a decade, the idea of a new Specials album was first mooted in 2012. "We never had a long-term plan after we started in 2009, and we still don't," insists Horace. When The Specials reformed, Horace had been working for a decade as a teacher at Corley Centre, a school for children with communication difficulties in Warwickshire, combining that with a career as a respected artist in the Pop Art field. He speaks with a reasoned precision, occasionally checking "Does that make sense?" when he finishes speaking. (His answers always do.) Horace still lives in Coventry, his accent coming through when he gets excited. In essence, Horace Panter perfectly fits his nickname Sir Horace Gentleman. Talking of *Encore*'s genesis, he admits: "When Lynval called me about the reunion, I thought: 'Shouting at children or being a rock star?' It was easy! I miss the children, but I don't miss the teaching. When we first started again, I thought: 'OK, we'll do this for a year, then I'll go back to work as a teacher.' I figured I'd get to pay off my mortgage. Then it took off so well that we did it again in 2010, and then again in 2011. But then it got to 2012, and we thought, 'We should make a record.'"

Nikolaj Torp Larsen joined the band on keyboards in 2009

© @johanneteglgard

EXIT NEVILLE AND RODDY

Before writing sessions could begin in earnest, first Neville Staple and then guitarist Roddy Radiation left. Asked if either could come back, Lynval is atypically vague, responding: "Never say never. Where we are right now, we're enjoying this period. It's a wonderful time we're having. We've made some great songs and we're happy with that. Anything else? Time will tell."

It was 2014 before writing began. Initially, however, The Specials played it safe, deciding which songs to cover for a new album. "Rather than baring our souls straight away, we thought covers would be a good place to start – we were the original covers band anyway," Horace points out. "We'd always taken an old song and recontextualised it. *Monkey Man* was initially about nightclub bouncers and we made it a comment on social unrest. We knew we had to acknowledge the past 40 years had happened, so we were listening to stuff like LCD Soundsystem. That's what we listened to for our version of The Equals' *Black Skinned Blue Eyed Boys*."

An audacious opening track, The Specials' update of the 1970 anti-war anthem by Eddy Grant's old band is indeed a startlingly modern slice of disco. "When I first came to England from Jamaica in 1964, The Rolling Stones were my favourites," recalls Lynval. "Then I saw The Equals on *Top Of The Pops* and that was it. Them being the first multi-racial band I'd seen, they made it seem so natural. People think 2 Tone was the time music became multi-racial, and right now feels a wonderful time to educate people about The Equals getting there first."

The Valentines' 1967 early reggae classic *Blam Blam Fever* soon became another pick, sounding in The Specials' care like a hyperactive menace. "That's from touring a lot in America,"

explains Horace. "I was fascinated by their gun culture, how you can buy guns in sports shops. It highlights America's gun crime, especially those hideous school shootings."

Although it's lyrically still depressingly relevant thanks to Donald Trump's presidency, the most surprising cover on *Encore* is *The Lunatics (Have Taken Over The Asylum)*. Originally, of course, it was the debut single by Fun Boy Three, released just five months after they'd walked out on The Specials. There are rumours that it had originally been planned as The Specials' single to follow *Ghost Town*… "I don't know whether we'd have gone ahead with it as a single," Horace ponders. "But, yes, it was written while Terry, Lynval and Neville were still in The Specials. They were considering presenting it to the band, but then thought, 'Actually, we're probably better doing this on our own.'"

TOO MUCH TOO YOUNG

Asking about Fun Boy Three brings a big sigh from the otherwise ebullient Lynval. "Yes, it's true *The Lunatics* could have followed *Ghost Town* in The Specials," he admits. "But everything got overtaken." A big pause. "We were so big when *Ghost Town* came out, we could have been as mega as U2. Man, what a crazy band we were. We chose not to carry on down that road, because…" An even longer pause. "I still wonder why we left to form Fun Boy Three. *The Lunatics (Have Taken Over The Asylum)* says a lot about us, too!"

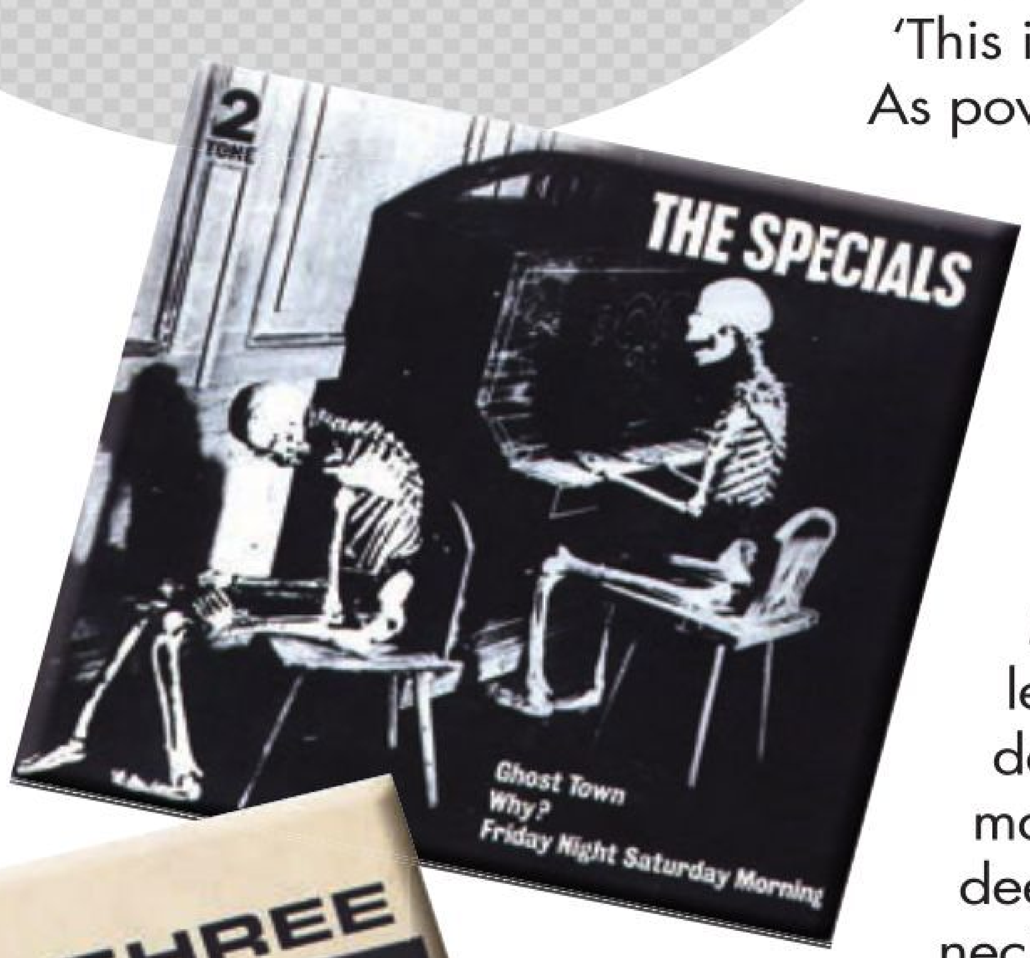
Before Neville Staple left The Specials in 2013, there was vague talk about him, Lynval and Terry playing some Fun Boy Three concerts. "It crossed our mind," shrugs Lynval. "The difference is, The Specials is in our blood. Fun Boy Three did some nice things. Terry and I had become very creative, and *Faith, Hope And Charity* is a great song. I'm proud of what Fun Boy Three did. But can you imagine us and Bananarama with ra-ra skirts now?"

Lynval and Horace both volunteer that taking some time off could have kept The Specials together longer. "It was *intense,*" emphasises Lynval. "We had to ride that beast all the time, and we got pulled forward and back by it. A little breather, it couldn't have hurt." As for Horace: "More time off would have helped, but people would have left anyway. We were all starting to find our own feet musically. A core might have remained, but not everyone."

The Specials' reunion tours have been a gleeful reminder of how powerful a live presence they are. It's those early touring days that are their fondest memories of their first incarnation. Horace recalls playing their first ever festival, in Belgium in August 1979, going on stage at 2pm after The Cure. "We'd had the same equipment for a couple of years, and it was falling to bits," says Panter. "We had no roadies, we had to set everything up ourselves. Then we went on, and we absolutely destroyed the place. There was a 12ft chain-link fence at the front of the stage. The audience tore it down,

"WHAT HAPPENED HIT ME MUCH LATER. GOING OUT TO A BAR, I'D HAVE MY BACK TO THE WALL, LOOKING ROUND EVERYWHERE TO SEE IF ANYONE WANTED TO STAB ME."

LYNVAL GOLDING



came charging towards the lip of the stage. It was the only time when I honestly felt I could walk on water – and our music had done that. I realised, 'This is what our music can do.'"

As powerful as The Specials were, their defiant politics and proudly multi-racial line-up made them enemies to some. *Why?*, the B-side of *Ghost Town*, was recorded after Lynval was attacked by National Front thugs following a show in 1980. He was stabbed in the neck, showing *Classic Pop* the small but vivid scar he's been left with. He's understandably horrified decades later that the colour of his skin made him a target. "The scars went much deeper than this," he says, pointing at his neck. "It made me so scared for so long. I was in intensive care, but I was on so much pain medication that I couldn't feel anything. I heard a nurse say, 'We can't stop the bleeding'. I could see blood pouring out of me, but I thought, 'What are you talking about? I can't feel no blood!' What happened hit me much later. Going out to a bar, I'd have my back to the wall, looking round everywhere to see if anyone wanted to stab me."

The attack has made Lynval appalled by the rise in knife crime. "I survived what happened. But in

The reformed Specials on stage at the Roundhouse, London, November 2014

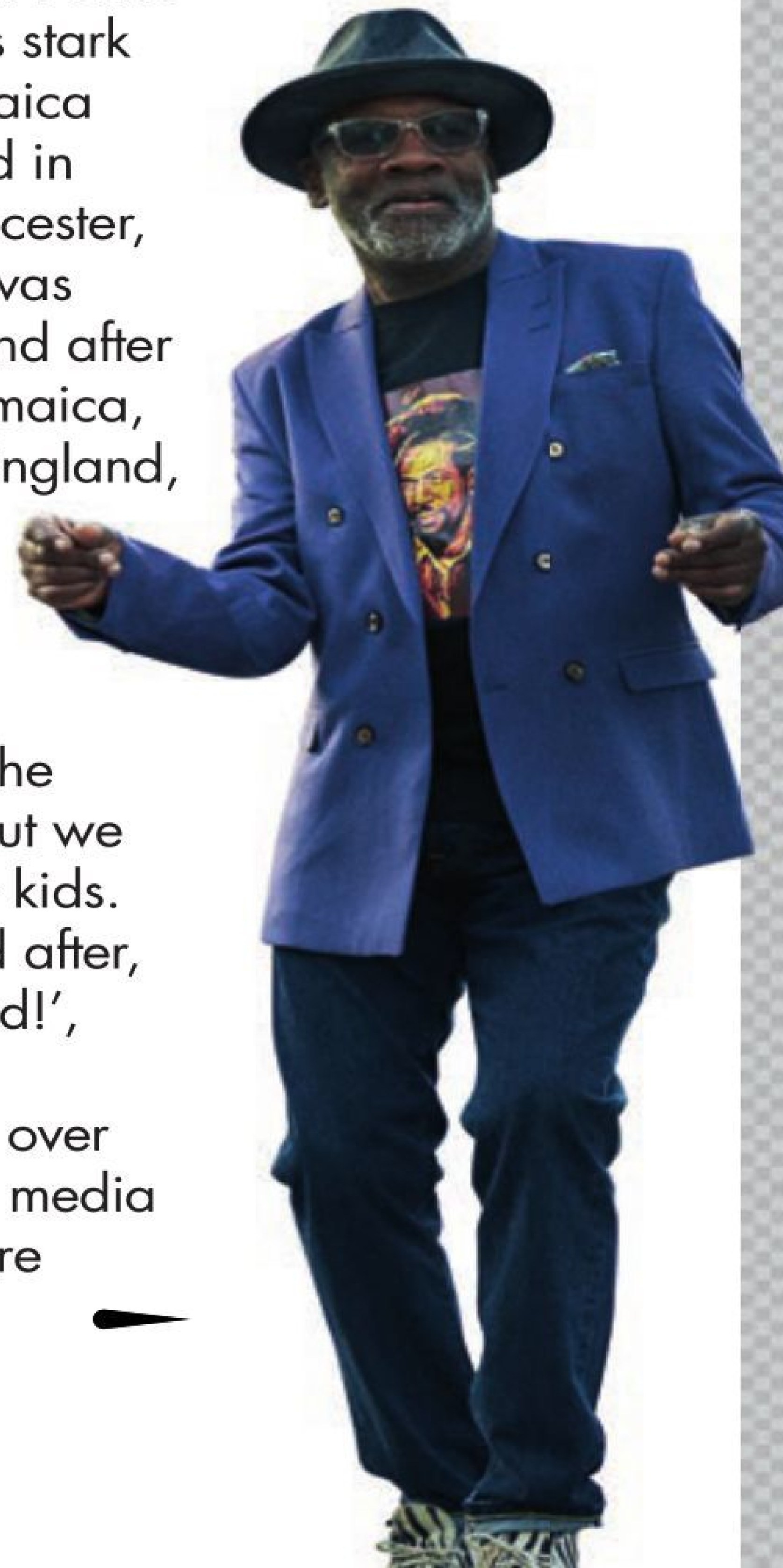
© Getty Images

here," he says, tapping his head, "It took me a long time to get over the emotional trauma. When I see reports of kids getting stabbed, I think of how long that pain really lasts."

One of the undoubted highlights of *Encore* is *B.L.M.* Short for "Black Lives Matter", *B.L.M.* is lyrically a companion to *Why?*, epic funk in the vein of Daft Punk's *Giorgio By Moroder* in which Lynval recounts his stark history of facing racism since he came from Jamaica aged eight to live with his father, who had settled in England in the early 50s. They were first in Gloucester, moving to Coventry five years later. "My father was invited by Sir Winston Churchill to rebuild England after the war," notes Lynval. "He'd been a tailor in Jamaica, but he couldn't get work at Burton the tailors in England, so he ended up in a foundry. He had to sleep in a garage."

Lynval's early experiences of racism from fellow pupils in Gloucester puzzled him. "There were three white kids in my school in Jamaica," he recalls. "It was partly from the colonial system, but we were conditioned to look after the white minority kids. I thought a minority kid like me would get looked after, too. So when kids yelled, 'Hey, you black bastard!', I was terrified. It was completely alien to me."

Having lived with his wife June in America for over 20 years, Lynval believes some aspects of social media are helpful in combating racism, saying: "Kids are getting killed by police brutality. Social media is



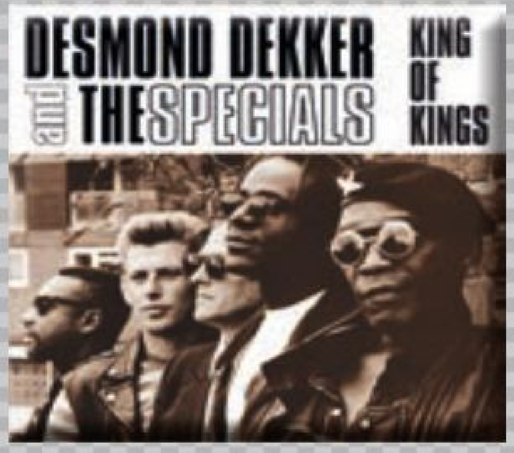
YOU CAN GO YOUR OWN WAY

THE HISTORY OF THE SPECIALS AND ITS OFF-SHOOT BANDS IS A KNOTTY AND COMPLICATED ONE...

After Terry, Lynval and Neville left for Fun Boy Three, The Special AKA took three years to release their only album *In The Studio* in 1984. Jerry Dammers and John Bradbury were the only original members, but Horace and Roddy guested, with Stan Campbell and Rhoda Dakar singing. It's best known for *Free Nelson Mandela*. In the same year, after Fun Boy Three split, Lynval and Neville formed Sunday Best with The Selecter's Pauline Black for one single, *Pirates On The Airwaves*.

Six years later, in 1990, Special Beat featured Lynval, Neville, Horace and John Bradbury, alongside Ranking Roger from The Beat. They released several live albums.

Neville, Lynval, Horace and Roddy reunited under The Specials banner in 1993 as the backing band for Desmond Dekker's album *King Of Kings*. Their keyboardist was Mark Adams, a pupil Lynval had spotted playing piano when giving a talk at Ernesford Grange School in Coventry – Mark co-wrote *Embarrassed By You* on *Encore*. *King Of Kings* led to the most bizarre Specials release, as X Specials, in 1994: a cover of Slade's *Coz I Love You* produced by Slade bassist Jim Lea.



Neville, Lynval, Horace, Roddy and Mark remained for four albums as The Specials: covers set *Today's Specials* in 1996, plus new albums *Guilty 'Til Proved Innocent!* in 1998 and *Skinhead Girl* in 2000. They split that year, but studio sessions formed 2001's *Conquering Ruler*. And that was it, until The Specials' official reunion in 2008.

REVERENTIAL MESSAGE

REVEREND AND THE MAKERS' JON McCLURE ON THE SPECIALS' ENDURING APPEAL

"My family lived in a mainly Jamaican area in Sheffield. The only music that the Asian, black and white kids agreed on was 2 Tone and UB40 before *Red Red Wine*. When *A Message To You, Rudy* came on, everyone was into it. That's powerful.

As much as our imperial Empire heritage is a stain on British history, The Specials could only have come from here. The mix of white and West Indian kids couldn't have happened anywhere else. It's sad that multi-racial bands are still so rare. The Specials showed how powerful that mix can be, but streaming has only made it harder because it sends people into their own comfortable niches.

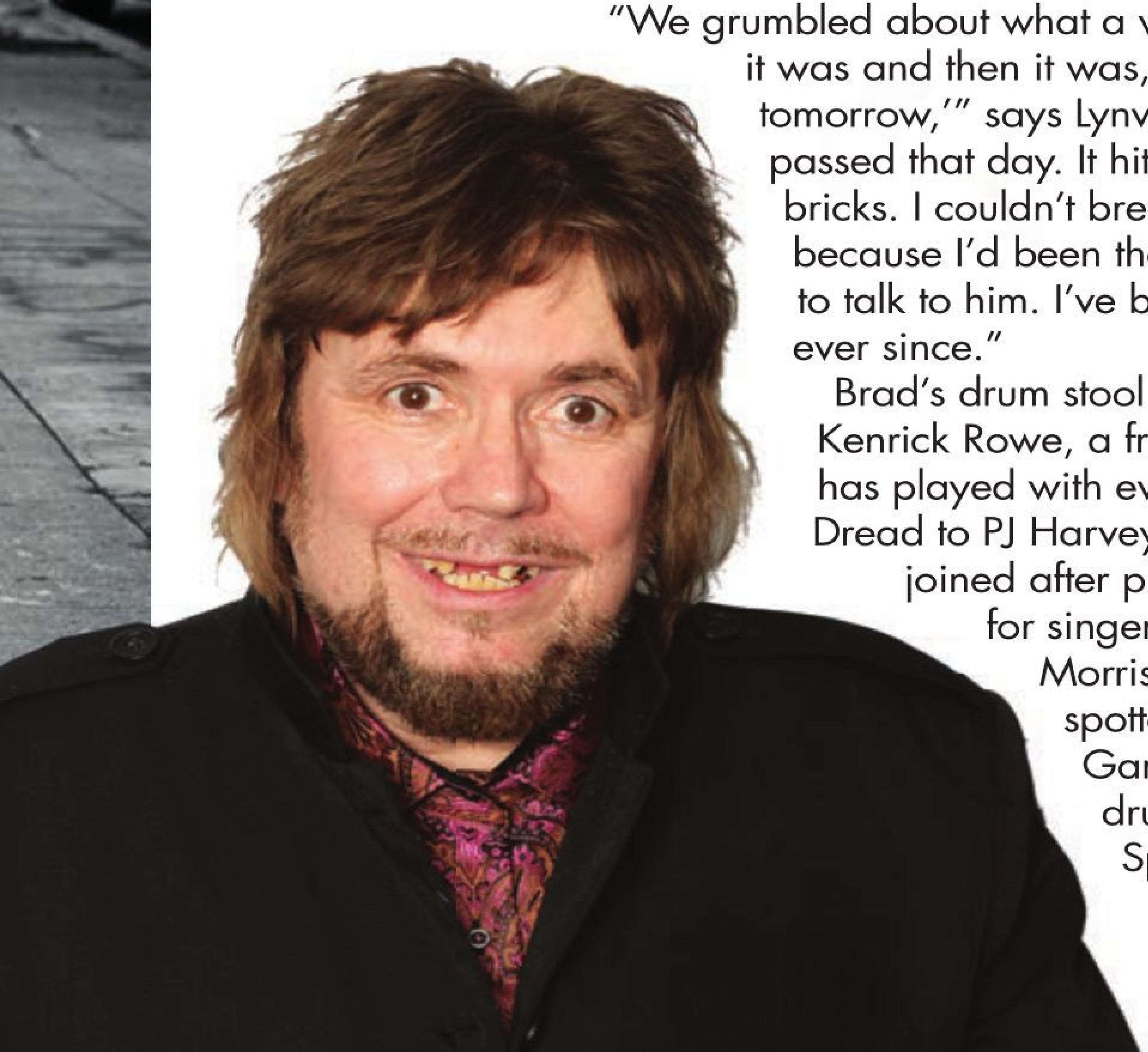
The Specials arrived in that exciting brief window when punk had made anything possible. It was a time when it was alright for anyone to try anything. People could fuck about on the dole back in the day, and there's no money to help anyone now.

We certainly need The Specials back. With Brexit and the rise of Tommy Robinson, there couldn't be a better time for political music. Their message has gravitas coming from Terry Hall, who's been saying, 'This is shit' for a long time. Without Jerry, I worried they wouldn't be the same, but they've smashed it. It gets harder to make uptempo music when you get older without sounding like you're trying too hard. The fact *Encore* is so danceable is an incredibly difficult feat to have pulled off. I hope there are young musicians now railing against how shit society is who get spotted and have the same impact. And I hope they're allowed the chance to say so by the media.

I know Horace a bit, and it's hilarious. We're cool with each other, but there is that undertow from me of, 'You know I fucking love you, don't you?'"

Although *Encore* is the seventh album credited to The Specials (*In The Studio* was released under the Special AKA moniker), it's the first LP since 1980's *More Specials* to feature Terry Hall

Left: The current three-piece Specials. The door remains open (well, ajar, at least) to former members Jerry Dammers, Roddy Radiation and Neville Staple.



Below: Ex-Special Jerry Dammers. He currently fronts the band The Spatial AKA Orchestra.

© Getty Images

brilliant for sharing images of that brutality that would otherwise never get seen. It's where *B.L.M.* comes from."

Equally powerful is Terry Hall's portrayal of his battles with depression in *The Life And Times (Of A Man Called Depression)*. Terry was unavailable for this feature, but *Classic Pop* hopes to interview Terry at a future date.

As sublime as his lyrics are on *Encore*, he proved most reluctant to write for a new Specials album. Lynval laughs: "Terry is like one of those old cars with a crankshaft. You have to *craaank* Terry up to get his lyrics started. Thank God we did, because he's been amazing."

Horace admits it's only since The Specials reformed that he's become friends with their singer, saying: "I don't think I ever knew Terry back in the day. There were seven of us, so that's a lot of people to get to know. Now, I know that Terry is very, very funny."

Another reason *Encore* needed to take time was the impact of John Bradbury's death in 2015. The drummer had been a key part of those early writing sessions, and Lynval recalls the pair of them threatening to kidnap Terry until he began writing songs again. Horace says: "Brad's death is something I might have suppressed, because it wasn't that difficult for me to play again without him. It was horribly unfortunate, of course.

"But you've got two choices – you carry on or you don't, and if it had been me that passed I'd have expected the guys to carry on."

Lynval had seen Brad the day before his death, when they watched their beloved Chelsea lose 3-0 to Terry's team Manchester United.

"We grumbled about what a woeful game it was and then it was, 'OK, see you tomorrow,'" says Lynval. "And Brad passed that day. It hit me like a ton of bricks. I couldn't breathe, hyperventilating because I'd been the last one in the band to talk to him. I've been on anti-depressants ever since."

Brad's drum stool is now occupied by Kenrick Rowe, a friend of Nikolaj's who has played with everyone from Mikey Dread to PJ Harvey. Nikolaj had himself joined after playing keyboards for singer-songwriter James Morrison, where he was spotted by Lynval's friend Gareth Brown, Lily Allen's drummer. "The reason The Specials were apart for so long is they had to wait for me to grow up and join them," laughs Nikolaj, as Lynval adds: "It's true, we had to wait for this beautiful boy to get big."

Horace's effusiveness of Nikolaj's skills is more practical, saying: "He has a musical virtuosity that Lynval and I don't possess. He has the arranger's talent Jerry had, too. I made a big sign for the studio when we were recording that said 'Does it need it?' I'm very much in favour of minimal four-track recording, where Nikolaj loves the kitchen sink. That balance is how *Encore* works."

THE WRATH OF KHAN

Jerry Dammers' talent for arranging was a large part of The Specials' first line-up. He would only have taken part in a reunion if the songs had been completely reworked, which proved too much for the rest of the band. Lynval and Horace remain sad rather than angry at their old bandmate.

Horace: "I think about Jerry every day. It's a real shame that we couldn't resolve our differences, because we'd have made some fantastic music again. Could he still rejoin? In this business, never say never… he said diplomatically!"

Lynval: "I'll always have a special place in my heart for Jerry. It's tough to reflect on the past, because I think, 'Man, Jerry should be here with us.' But we had to think about the audience.

"They want these songs the way they sounded. Jerry is a very talented man, but he was a little too far ahead of how we wanted to perform our songs."

> "I THINK ABOUT JERRY EVERY DAY. IT'S A REAL SHAME WE COULDN'T RESOLVE OUR DIFFERENCES, BECAUSE WE'D HAVE MADE SOME FANTASTIC MUSIC AGAIN. COULD HE STILL REJOIN? NEVER SAY NEVER."
>
> HORACE PANTER

Anyone who thinks that attitude means The Specials have become conservative need only hear *10 Commandments*, their incendiary reworking of Prince Buster's dated sexism turned into a feminist rallying cry by activist Saffiyah Khan. Saffiyah became known when she smilingly faced down an EDL goon at a far-right rally in Birmingham in 2017. Photos showed her wearing a Specials T-shirt…

"When I saw that photo, I started reading up about Saffiyah," recalls Lynval. "I thought, 'Wow!' We had to get to know someone like that." Horace takes up the story: "When we played our album launch at The 100 Club, when Saffiyah did *10 Commandments* I thought, 'She's the new Grace Jones'. At that moment, Terry turned to me and said, 'She's the new MIA.' It's not for me to say if Saffiyah should do more music, but I certainly hope she does."

Revitalised, as topical and on-point as they ever were, Lynval jokes that it definitely won't be another 38 years before another Specials album.

Horace sums up their newfound calm approach: "We've told all the jokes and the war stories, so now The Specials is like *Last Of The Summer Wine*." Terry, Lynval and Horace aren't quite ready to be rolling down a hill in a tin bath just yet…

ANTHEM MUSIC PRESENTS

POST-PUNK & SKA

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BANDS WHO TURNED PUNK ON ITS HEAD INCLUDING ESSENTIAL TRACKS, IN-DEPTH FEATURES AND INTERVIEWS WITH THE LEGENDS WHO MADE IT ALL HAPPEN

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